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THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN

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TO
C. E. WHEELER
A LITTLE
MONUMENT
OF A
GREAT AFFECTION

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THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN

Yet further, you never enjoy the world aright, till you so love the beauty of enjoying it, that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it. And so perfectly hate the abominable corruption of men in despising it, that you had rather suffer the flames of Hell than willingly be guilty of their error. There is so much blindness and ingratitude and damned folly in it. The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a region of Light and Peace, did not men disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God.

THOMAS TRAHERNE.

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THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN

I

VERY often when Miss Paul awoke in the morning, she remembered, with gentle regret, her days which she called—palmy.

Now her circumstances were, what she called, straitened. Single-handed she waged the long conflict against dirt and hunger ; and learned more in three days than in the full thirty years of her previous life, of the disposal of the enemies' forces. This, like all suddenly acquired knowledge, at first surprised her. The attack of hunger was far more simply parried than she imagined : her standard of necessaries she revised. The other foe, however, nearly overwhelmed her by his unceasing encroachments. Shut windows meant no air and yet

in abundance, dirt : smuts filtered through the cracks : dust made its slow way through the floor. To dirt nothing seemed impenetrable. There were places she dared not inspect. Too close an inspection made her long campaign appear hopeless.

She awoke very often to gentle regret. Gentle, though the word must predominate in description of her, cannot dismiss her feeling ; may, indeed, readily give a false impression of its nature. Understand one thing about a human being, and you have a clue of entry into that being's mind (a maltreated part of many an organism), which to follow delicately and selflessly is to widen one's prospect of life, quite without exaggeration, twofold.

And what from swine to swallows, from mud to the stars, may life be or not be ? It is a mystery always. There is mystery about the life of an oak, which has quietly grown in the same place, keeping its secret and its changing beauty, for many hundreds of years. And man —with his spirit and mind and body, with his power of speech and laughter and thought and

tears, with his will and his conscience, with his fears and hopes, with his love and his hatred and his indifference, with his desires and aspirations, with his moods and knowledge and ignorance—man, even at his lowest, even when he appears to have thwarted his own humanity to dulness,—man staggers the imagination. Human power may be great, but power greater than human is needed to see life steadily and see it whole. By the flash of an illuminating glimpse, with the steadfast memory of it, or by the painful study of one of life's smallest phases, by these means it is possible sometimes to learn a little, if the scope and sacredness of the undertaking be properly realised. Without love and reverence, however, you may observe much, but you can learn nothing, know nothing, understand nothing.

For the gentle regret, which Miss Paul felt, there were several reasons. Her regret began, undoubtedly, in a desire, which had pathetically lasted, for an immediate cup of hot tea—without tedious preliminaries, the lighting of gas-stove or spirit-lamp, the boiling of hot water,

and others. It was easier to do without than to prepare.

Miss Paul felt no animosity against fate or against the fatal improvidence of her deceased brother. She accepted her lot without questioning it—or herself or any one else. Her courage was no less real because it was not conscious. The barriers which had fenced her from the crudities of life—cold and hunger and dirt—toppled and fell, and she, with scarcely a shiver of fear, set to work to "do" for herself on a bare hundred pounds a year.

After her brother's death she took a sheet of paper, and, having nearly dazed herself with facts and figures, decided how she could live. Her choice shrank to extremes, and nothing eventually remained between the depths of the country and the centre of the town.

Really there was no call for the black and white discipline of that uneasy evening: her mind was, as they say, made up by what was much the strongest feature of her character, namely, her instinct. She confessed to a silly whim (so she stigmatised herself) for the town's

very centre. The paraphernalia of facts and figures were a kind of apology, of justification almost, to her conscience for obeying this whim, not too blindly. Though she loved the country and liked to tend flowers, the centre of the town, even in one room without a servant, had attractions which outweighed everything placeable in the other scale. There was the opportunity of hearing music, with her a constant importunity : about that she could to herself be articulate. But there was another reason, which was stronger and which was too vague to take the shape even of any thought ; for about herself she had, oddly enough, small practice in thinking, and so her conclusions on that subject were far less right than the intelligence she showed in understanding the written thoughts of others (she read with avidity) would have led one to expect. The unshaped idea, which formed her choice, was that in the centre of the town she would be stranded less drily from the stream of life. If she could there maintain the struggle of existence—that great hypothesis ! She found that she could, and save, moreover, enough to

spend on seats for twenty-six concerts in the year.

So Miss Paul lived on the top floor of a house in a crescent which stood back, pleasantly behind trees, from the Marylebone Road. A bachelor lived on the floors beneath, and on the ground floor—the landladies. Three small rooms comprised her actual battle-ground, for which she paid £30 a year. Her food and coal and washing came to £46, service to £11. The rest of her money went in clothes, fares, light, and concerts. Illness—she smiled and shrugged her shoulders and fortunately kept, with the exception of an occasional cold, well. For three years she had—the gentle warrior—waged her war in these rooms and won. Her face showed victory.

The gentle regret, which now on this morning (a Sunday morning towards the end of March) of her thirty-third birthday she awoke again to experience, was considerably tempered by the fact that she was, as she smiled to put it to herself, "on her own." She continued to taste of independence a flavour which at

first, and for a long time after her brother's death, saddened her sensitive nature, succumbing swiftly to the shadow of a charge of heartlessness, though any one knowing her well (but no one did) would have laughed at such a charge.

Though in her brother's house at Norwood she had known her brother's friends and their wives and mothers and daughters, she had had no fellowship with them of any kind. They thought her peculiar, a little pitiable, but on the whole pleasant; not, however, pleasant enough to search for after Mr. Paul's demise and her own, as they called it, disappearance. Miss Paul accepted their silent verdict without rancour, as she accepted most things of that kind without rancour, and quietly went on her lonely way. But her loneliness had become, as on this morning she came very near to discover, less distressing than it had been among the little crowd of Norwood acquaintances. She was more alone but less lonely.

As a matter of fact her present loneliness was the soil in which she developed; and,

like a rose after the first shock of being transplanted, she grew. Though she was in her own opinion the most ordinary and unimportant of spinsters, to a well-eyed person she was, even at first sight, of high interest. You must not think that she was, what is called, a striking woman. She was not. She was medium height: she dressed drably though neatly. But her movement was uncommonly graceful, and her eyes—this is the point which perhaps an intelligently observant *one* in ten thousand passers might have noticed — her eyes, though they were not specially large or specially beautiful, seemed to possess a wider range of sight than is quite usual to human eyes. She held her head back as she walked and looked a little downwards — as though through pince-nez, which, however, she had never worn. She moved through the streets with absolute assurance, because she supposed that no one could possibly take the least notice of her. She was pleased with her complete insignificance, and so it put her (quite without her knowledge) in the position

of a queen, for whom the motley pageant passes.

But now Miss Paul lay in bed. And as she lay she was called sharply back from her dozing desire for tea by a smart snap and a shrill squeal of terror. She started guiltily, knowing well the cause of the noise. A mouse had been growing too familiar with her rooms. The smelly little fellow had taken to scratching at the kitchen door which opened on to her bedroom, had scuffled about after crumbs, making, for his size, a dreadful noise, and Miss Paul had at last bought a trap in which to catch him. Now she had caught him—on a Sunday morning she had caught him, when she was without the charwoman—and what in the world she was to do with him, she did not know. There was a silence. She listened for another squeal. None came. She got out of bed. She decided to go out all day, and in the morning Mrs. Cawke would quickly kill him in a pail of water. She began to dress hurriedly, stopping every now and then to listen. All remained still. Miss Paul

imagined the mouse's terror vividly. She put herself in the mouse-trap and trembled. All the day and all the night she could not, without food, wait and wait for death on the Monday morning. No living thing must. She summoned her courage, and, putting on a flannel dressing-gown, went into the kitchen. She walked straight to the sink, under which stood a pail. Taking out the scrubbing-brush, she filled the pail with water. She did not look at the floor by the cupboard, where the trap lay, but she felt the mouse's tiny eyes piercing through her from behind the cage's wires. She set the pail on the floor, and, turning her head, she lifted the trap. The mouse scratched wildly at the wires. There was a splash. Miss Paul hurried to the door and then . . . resolution forsook her; she hurried back to the pail, plunged her hand into the water, wetting the sleeve of her flannel dressing-gown almost to the elbow, and drew out the trap with a gasp. The mouse did not breathe. It lay on its small back, draggled and exhausted. Then Miss Paul found relief

in swift action. She seized a flannel from the plate-rack — luckily it was dry — she lit the stove, put the flannel in a fire-proof pot and the pot on the jets of gas. Very soon the flannel was hot. She gently pulled the mouse out of the trap by his tail, and rolled him neatly in the hot flannel, from which peered his whiskered head. His eyes opened. Miss Paul rubbed his stomach with her forefinger. His paws moved. She unrolled him. He stood crouched on his four legs trembling, and she left him to his devices.

In her bedroom she listened for some minutes; then she looked into the kitchen, and smiled to see no trace of the mouse.

After this intrusion of death and adventure further dozing became for Miss Paul impossible. She put the kettle on, and while the water was boiling she finished dressing, and then went into her sitting-room to drink three small cups of tea, and eat four thin slices of bread and butter—her breakfast. Her sitting-room was tiny, and could not have been furnished more pleasantly. Remnants of her

possessions fitted it exactly, and each remnant was to Miss Paul a separate treasure. The squat oak bureau and the small gate table had been given her by her mother's mother, who had received it from *her* mother's mother; its former history was unknown. In one drawer were two neatly tied packets of letters, one written by her great-grandmother, the other written to her great-grandmother. The chest which had served as her father's great-great-grandfather's bank (he was a sailor) now served her as a coal-box. The bookcase her own father had given her when she was a little girl and fell heir to her grandmother's oak pieces. These were two chairs, one high backed, the other easy; to these no sentiment or value was attached; but she would have starved slowly to death before she parted with the family oak. The female branch of the family was strangely dominant. Her mother and her mother's mother were amazingly alike in feature and expression. She knew that from hearsay. What was even more amazing, however, was the resemblance of feature between

the faded miniature of her great-great-grandmother, which stood on the bureau, and Miss Paul herself. The setting and odd expression of the eyes (in Miss Paul the oddness was a little intensified), the nose, the mouth, the shape of the head, were startlingly the same. Indeed, if a quarter of the stories about these women of her family were true, they must have been great creatures: alike in strength of character as in feature, and like many other women of character, alike in being allied to nonentities of husbands. Among them there was an odd growth of spiritual force. The walls of the room were green; on them hung four photographs of Italian masters, and a photograph of Beethoven's death-mask. That comprised the furniture of the room—with one exception. The exception was Miss Paul's most treasured possession, and had been the most treasured possession of Miss Paul's mother. It was fantastically useless and oddly ornamental. It was the first thing that a visitor would have noticed on entering. In its own way it so dominated the room that

the rest of the furniture, storied and valuable and charming as the furniture was, seemed immediately accessory. It was an oak chair: a tiny oak chair, too small for any one but a very delicately made child of three to use, yet too large for any but a gigantic doll's house. The chair stood on the floor by the bookcase, about two feet from the wall. On the centre of the back was carved the face of a grotesque, such as you may see in stone as a spout on an old church. There was extraordinary life, however, in the carved features, the very fierceness of life. If you looked at it long (and you were bound to do so) it presently seemed as though the spirit of some druidical old oak had somehow been caught, and had then writhed into the shape of a chair. To look at it would have convinced a sceptic, hardened as the chair's own seat, of the supernatural, or, to put it more accurately, would have stirred the sense, however dulled and obscure, of the supernatural in him—for say what he will, no man is quite without that sense. What is called the supernatural is everywhere,

like the wind, and like the air is breathed by all. The part of life which the eyes see is paltry compared with the life that is invisible. From what source does instinct, the most maligned of human powers, take its strength? Because instinct is the only guide of animals, an odd human prejudice exists against it. Are we not higher than the brutes who follow their animal instincts? We do not certainly become so (Angry Madam) by not following our human instinct. But why compare what is different? Why mete out praise and blame? Few are quite moral enough to blame the monkey for infringing the code of the elephant. Yet the dissimilarity between a cabdriver and a Shelley is greater, in spite of a surface physical resemblance, than that between an elephant and a monkey. Human instincts vary magnificently, and lead to fulfilment.

Miss Paul had lived for thirty-three years. None of the things which are known as events had happened to her. She had not loved or been loved. She had taken part in no movement. The days had passed over her head

with quite, to an outsider, astonishing sameness. It would have taken her five minutes to tell the story of her life, and she spoke slowly. Yet if any one had sympathised with her about the monotony of her life, she would have opened wide her eyes like an incredulous child. She was like a child who has been allowed to explore a large house alone. Thirty-three years had passed by like the first bewildering hour of the child's afternoon. Excitement prevented her from settling to any occupation. She must see every room before she was called—to tea. Unlike a child, Miss Paul's excitement and wonder grew; for unlike a house of brick, the house of life seemed to expand limitlessly in all directions as her power of observation developed. That she should take possession of any of the treasures she saw in the house, occurred to her only as a kind of delightful pretence—like a child who would immediately assume entire ownership as a part of the exploring game. This arbitrary ownership without contracts or any business formality is not of course a serious matter.

Or do things belong to those who enjoy them most? How serious is the possession of a library by a man who has not intelligence, of a piano by one who cannot play and has no ear for music, of health by one who misuses it, of a mansion by one who has no friends, of life by one who is bored by it? At any rate, Miss Paul was amply content with her manner of ownership. Naturally it left her no time to think about herself, still less to imagine that she was extraordinary for not doing so.

Little things act as a turning point; a straw is sufficient to show the direction of a great wind. The capture and resuscitation of the mouse was the first of a train of events. Without Miss Paul's knowledge it started her on an occupation other than that of wonder. Our child in the house drew her finger across a table, and finding an unexpected line, started to dust the furniture of the room. Miss Paul had crossed the mouse's line of life, had perhaps influenced him, Heaven knows how much. The action awakened a sleeping power in her, of which

she was perfectly ignorant; the power of entering the lives of others. In other words, she was opening the door of another room full of wonders, compared with which the wonders of the other rooms were insignificant. Quite oblivious of this, Miss Paul took the tea things into the kitchen, and washed them, as the phrase is, up. While she dried them she looked for signs of the mouse; his whereabouts were, however, effectually concealed from her, and quite without any reason other than that she had rather played the devil to him and with him, she decided that his name should be Faust.

II

ON the floors underneath—that is to say, on the second and third floors—lived a bachelor. His name was Edward Paveley. If Miss Paul was quite remarkable for the fact that she never thought about herself, Dr. Paveley was equally remarkable for the fact that he very rarely thought about any one but himself. He was an old man when he was seventeen, and the Sunday of Miss Paul's adventure with the mouse happened to be his forty-first birthday. The fact is—he had never cared for any one.

He was interested in men who could talk on his subject, but considered words more fitly written than spoken. Speech was a clumsy medium, in his opinion, and he looked upon conversation as an agreeable adjunct, like nuts, to wine. But no one touched his

affections; he was not bitten, as he put it, by the craze for intimacy.

Whether Dr. Paveley was to blame for this, or whether it was his misfortune, is a subject on which the profoundest philosophers disagree. There was nothing in the circumstances of his past life to explain this phenomenon. His life had, in its own way, been as uneventful as that of Miss Paul. He had been to a good day-school, from which he had won a scholarship to Oxford. At Oxford he won a prize fellowship and a post at a London University, where he lectured upon history, and where he would continue to lecture upon history, as long as his voice could carry through the not very large hall in which the lectures were delivered. One of the most respectable literary weeklies boasted him as its historical authority, and every book of any historical significance which appeared was immediately despatched to him. The initiated among the paper's clerical readers said that they recognised his style, and it is probable they did so.

Dr. Paveley had occupied his rooms for six years when Miss Paul took the attics, as he called them. They had been empty for nearly four years, so that the doctor naturally regarded Miss Paul's tenancy in the light of an intrusion. He resented every sign of her presence; he hated to hear her soft tread, and the gentle closing of her door; he scowled angrily on the rare occasions when he met her in the hall or on the stairs. The proximity of a single woman filled him with uneasiness. "Give her but a least excuse," he grimly thought, measuring his eligibility by his banker's book, his European reputation for historical accuracy and his placid habits, "and she will endeavour to obtain me for her own and marry me." Miss Paul was conscious of his resentment, and her sympathy with its cause made her creep up the stairs by his rooms like a tremulous marauder. She was accordingly surprised when on the Sunday morning of her adventure with the mouse Dr. Paveley did not abruptly retreat into his room and shut the door, but stood

in the doorway and wished her a "Good afternoon" as she passed.

His benevolence had been born of his pleasure in reading in his Sunday paper the review of a rival's book, in which his rival's work had been measured by the standard of the reviewer's opinion of that pre-eminent scholar Dr. Paveley's work; on that page of the paper his light obscured the light of his adversary, as the sun obscures a halfpenny dip. And previously he had actually considered the man arbitrary in his judgments, had in his more expansive moments denounced him as a "spoofer," one of the few live words in his vocabulary.

Dr. Paveley, according to his Sabbatical custom, went to roost austerely during the afternoon at his club: Miss Paul went to St. Paul's Cathedral; and as she stopped later than usual to hear the organ which was unexpectedly being played, and as the doctor's sitting was shortened by the necessity of dressing for dinner, earlier by an outrageous half-hour than he liked, the strange chance,

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which lurks behind all human endeavour, willed that they should meet on the doorstep. Coming from opposite sides of the crescent, each arrived at identically the same moment, key in hand, before the front door.

Dr. Paveley's whole historical training and bias led him to disbelieve in chance. He sought for motive and immediately found one.

"Allow me, madam," he said, and with sublime frigidity ignored the gentle suggestion that the evening was fine. Chance, however, or one of her attendant imps, continued to sport round the doctor. For the second time during his ten years' habitation of those rooms he thrust the wrong key—the long key of his large roll-top desk—into the keyhole, and in the keyhole it most wantonly stuck. He rattled it angrily, and succeeded in fixing it quite firmly. Too late he employed the delicate treatment which the intricacy of even an old-fashioned lock demands. His efforts were unavailing. "Imbecile and pig-like thing," he muttered. "Asinine not to employ such modern contrivances as civilisation has put

within our reach. Progress," he rattled the key with increasing anger, "so-called progress," he swore under his breath, "and asinine not to have a patent lock."

"Haven't you, perhaps, the wrong key?" Miss Paul ventured to suggest.

"Yes, madam," declared Dr. Paveley. "Yes, madam, I have the wrong key and the wrong lock—infernally the wrong lock."

Miss Paul felt — and the doctor's tone implied that she should feel—that the lock and key and herself were found guilty of a base conspiracy against a higher power.

"The wrong lock," he muttered, kicking the door and shaking it.

"The wrong key," murmured Miss Paul, as though she were taking her part with due solemnity in a round game with children.

The doctor heard her, and the adjacent gas-lamp played lime-light to his scowl.

Miss Paul took a step forward. "Let me try my key," she faltered.

"May I ask, madam, of what possible use even your key might be, when mine is

inextricably jammed into the lock?" he icily rejoined, and stood with his hand off the key for the first time. The position was as painful as the ensuing silence.

"Let me ring," said Miss Paul, timidly.

"I am capable of that simple operation," retorted the doctor. He pressed the bell. They listened to its long, persistent sound.

"They are, I am afraid, out."

"Impossible," he vociferated, and beat a rat-tat with the knocker. The sound seemed to echo through the house, and then the church clock impassively announced the hour —a quarter to seven. "Impossible," he reiterated. "I am to dine in forty-five minutes at St. John's Wood—dressed."

"Dear me!" said Miss Paul a little feebly.

"Dear me! forsooth!" the doctor of letters snorted, and glared round as though for help.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to dress," Miss Paul was obliged by sheer nervousness to say.

"Do you realise, madam, that no one will be able to enter this house without the aid of a

locksmith ; that it is Sunday evening, and that it is highly improbable a locksmith can be found ? "

" Oh dear ! " said Miss Paul. The position, for all its seriousness, was fast overcoming her gravity. To hide her rising laughter, she stepped by her infuriated companion and put her hand on the key. And then—whether it was the last trick of Chance (or one of her attendant imps), or whether the fierce raps on the door had loosened, what one may call the grip—the key quietly allowed itself to be drawn from the lock.

She hastily inserted the right key and opened the door. Dr. Paveley pushed by her with a gruff " Thank you," and stalked up the stairs. Miss Paul heard his bedroom door slam during her own soft-footed ascent at the very moment that she became aware that his key—the offending key—was still in her possession. In consequence, she crept by his door and hurried up the remaining stairs so exactly in her haste like a child at the game of " I spy " that she almost cried out an exultant " Home "

as she shut the door on herself in her own room. The perplexity, caused by her possession of the key, cut short her exultation and mood of laughter. Dr. Paveley would surely want his key before his departure, and she could not face taking it back to him in person. At last she solved the difficulty by writing "Your key" on a half-sheet of white paper, which she tip-toed down all the stairs to leave conspicuously upon the hall-table.

Then she made up the fire and sat down, laughing to herself. Laughter is in itself a fascinating mystery. The human mask is illumined from within, as a lantern when its candle is lighted, that is, in genuine laughter. Its variety of tone shows the scope of the human instrument. Now this same laughter possessed Miss Paul. She sat silently in her chair, but it caused her body to shake a little, her breath to come irregularly, her eyes to sparkle, her forehead and cheeks to wrinkle, and her whole face to look quite delightful. She seemed, for some reason, more alive, or, as the saying is, younger. If any normally

sensitive person had been present, he or she would have been obliged to laugh with her; for laughter, like many other things, may be infectious.

But a heavy footstep sounded up the stairs, and a loud voice delivered the word "Madam," which passed from the doctor's lips instantaneously through all the neighbouring space, Heaven knows how far and with what disturbance of atoms, but incidentally through the wooden door and into Miss Paul's brain. Her brain took immediate cognisance, and laughter immediately fled.

"Madam," the loud voice continued, with the same results, no less remarkable for being general, and with an accompaniment of knocks upon the door, "Madam, you have in your possession the key which you so dexterously extracted from the lock."

Miss Paul opened the door. Laughter had left a little of its brightness upon her face and in her eyes. Dr. Paveley, as he looked at her, noticed this and was irritated by it.

"I put it on the hall-table," said Miss Paul.

"Humph!" said the doctor. "Did you?"

He looked over her shoulder into the room, and catching sight of the hobgoblin writhen into the form of a chair, he stared. The grotesque face, with its fierce immobile expression of life, held him, as though by some power, against his will. He felt the outline of Miss Paul's appearance and the brightness of her eyes, but saw only, as he stared, the weird thing. He stared with vacant horror until the weird thing, as it were, let him go. He shuddered, as a man shudders who passes through a sudden current of cold air in a warm valley, and wishing Miss Paul "Good evening" with a furtive gentleness, induced by fear, he turned away.

He had not, of course, passed down many steps before he laughed at this unpleasant sensation and its wooden cause as ridiculous nonsense—the most ridiculous nonsense. He did not hear Miss Paul say in her low, amused voice, "You shouldn't have done it, Loki"; and he did not hear the chair creak, or he would have perhaps had a more acute sensation

of creepiness to dispel by assuring ridicule, though solitary persons will often speak to inanimate objects, and furniture of the most prosaic and machine-made description will often creak, for no reason that we precisely know.

This was the chief event of Dr. Paveley's forty-first birthday; the dinner to which he went that evening in St. John's Wood, celebrated it in a minor way, although his health was drunk there by the company in good red wine. At the dinner his historical accuracy played him for a moment false: for in his narration of the lock and key incident, somehow the part each had played in the little farce became confused, and it was the lady's key which he had arrived on the doorstep to find jammed, and which he had forthwith quietly and deftly extracted from the lock. And the story was immediately seized upon as a practical and pertinent example of the folly of giving to women the power to vote, about which subject opinion in St. John's Wood ran very high at that time. Perhaps

the doctor felt uneasy at the confusion of fact, which made his story so much better than it originally was; but it is certain that he left the company earlier than he intended and earlier than the company desired. An uncomfortable thing happened to him as he walked towards the main road down which his omnibus ran; long enough to check one step and make him stumble, he saw plainly in the branches of a tree the grotesque face which was carved on the back of Miss Paul's small chair, and suddenly at the same moment a prowling cat gave an unearthly cry.

"Fiddle-sticks!" he muttered. "Bad wine! disgraceful stuff!"

But there grew in him the idea that some power, of which he was completely ignorant, had laid hold of him, and that he was no longer master of himself so completely as he had hitherto been. And that idea, even its germ, was to the highest degree uncomfortable and disturbing to such a man as Dr. Paveley. Moreover, into all that uncanny discomfort was woven the apparition of the single woman,

who lived on the floor above him, as he had seen her with the shadow of laughter upon her face.

No wonder, then, that he sat that evening on his return home in his leather-bound chair, glowering into the fire, and rigidly forcing his will to defeat the schemes of the woman who had, he thought, tried to throw this spell over him.

Miss Paul sat not ten yards above him, her heels on the small chair, reading. There was a smile upon her, for she was far away, walking down the glades of Spenser's realm of Faërie; unseen she was watching the knights and ladies and wild men, and all the beauty of the land in which their fights and great adventures happened.

She sat thus for a long time, faring on at length without the beckoning music and colour of Spenser's verse. As she sat, fire-gazing, she passed down a long avenue of great oak trees; the branches seemed symmetrical, yet the enormous design eluded her eye: she was thinking that, if she could step right back

and see the whole great line at one glance, the design would no longer elude her, when a twisted little old creature sprang out at a bound from a tree on one side and stood before her with his long arms crossed.

"I shall always be near to help you," the old creature said with the utmost gravity, and vanished at a bound on the other side of the avenue. He was gone a moment before she had time to identify him, and the oddity of a resemblance to something with which she was familiar brought her swiftly back. She took her feet off the small chair and, leaning forward with her hands on her knees, she looked at the grotesque face carved on its back.

"Loki," she said, "was that you, my dear?" and enchanted with the hope that it might have been, she smiled. Then she settled herself again and tried to make her way back to the avenue; but the entrance was closed against her.

One reason, perhaps, was that a sudden noise in the room underneath as of something hard

dropped or thrown, startled her. The first time it happened she thought the learned occupant had let a book fall; but then it sounded four times in rapid succession, and she was bewildered. Such noises had never before issued from Dr. Paveley's room.

The fact was that Dr. Paveley was much disturbed by the mouse, which had somehow found its way into his bedroom. He was just dropping asleep when a rustling and scratching roused him to listen. The scratching continued. He struck a match, and thought he saw the tail of a mouse whisk under the wardrobe. "Ssh!" he said in a violent whisper, and waited. As silence continued he composed himself again to sleep. But again there came the rustling and scratching, accompanied this time by a furtive squeaking—the *motif* of this Faust in distress. Dr. Paveley lighted the candle, and getting out of bed he peered about the room. There was no sign of any life. Stooping, he picked up a boot and stood in the middle of the room in his nightshirt, a frown on his face—prepared. There was absolute

stillness. Nothing moved. The doctor waited in spite of the cold which crept up his legs and made him shiver. For three brave minutes his strange vigil lasted. Then a stealthy scratching came from the direction of the cupboard. Turning slowly round he distinctly saw the mouse, and instantly discharged the boot. With a grim smile he got into bed again—not, however, before he had put two pairs of boots within reach of his hand, in case his first shot had not taken effect. His fury at being again disturbed caused him to fling the boots one after the other, like bolts at a venture, in the wild hope that he might in this way terrify the mouse into silence. But it was of no use ; and he was obliged throughout the night to share the persistent restlessness of the mouse.

III

A MAN who has lived more years than he will live, who is approaching the culminating discovery, the final experience, will often be amused, in looking back, at the landmarks on the way. The first step on any line of conduct must always look inconsiderable from the distance of attainment, whether that step lead up the hill or down. Such a landmark was Miss Paul's capture and release of the mouse which she had called Faust. Though the second event of that adventurous Sunday had obscured the first for a moment, it was on Monday morning brought back to her mind by the charwoman who, seeing signs of an immersion upon the mouse-trap, eagerly inquired about the incidents of the death and the disposal of the corpse. Her contempt for Miss Paul's

clemency was vividly expressed in a stare of incredulity and a sharp sniff; it offended the woman's nature that a pest, which had, partly through her skill, reached its proper destination —the bottom of a pail of water—should by a freak of soft-heartedness be set at large. That decided her that the place took more time than it was worth. She did her two hours' work with noisy impatience, and at half-past ten gave notice. To Miss Paul's gently offered protests the woman, with arms firmly akimbo, answered that Miss Paul did not suit her, never, in fact, had suited her. "Nor do I hold with parties stopping on after a party has spoke her mind, so I'll take a sixpence from you, which'll be only right and fair that I should, and we'll be as we was and no harm done."

Now it so happened that Dr. Paveley had insisted, when the rooms above his were let, that no link should exist between him and the new occupant. Accordingly the landladies—the Misses Jones—who kept four cats but no servant, were obliged to find a woman to do what work he wanted. This was a matter of

supreme difficulty. The woman who suited the doctor invariably quarrelled with the woman who came to Miss Paul, and the women who were friendly invariably found the doctor impossible to please.

The matter ceaselessly afflicted the landladies, and whenever they could waylay Miss Paul they begged her to use her influence with Dr. Paveley and persuade him to lessen the difficulty by allowing one charwoman to serve them both. Miss Paul naturally pointed out to them that her influence with the doctor was nil, or if any existed, would act counter to their wishes.

On this Monday morning they made again their timid and insistent suggestion. Mrs. Cawke had wished them a caustic farewell, so they knew Miss Paul was without help. Dr. Paveley's present woman was more troublesome than they could describe, and they thought that if only Miss Paul would speak to the doctor, she could so easily convince him that an altogether better class woman could be got by a union of their work and wages,

and that every one would be rendered much happier and more comfortable thereby—which was quite true.

Miss Paul said she would do what she could, and if an opportunity came would speak with Dr. Paveley. So the matter rested, and Miss Paul went out to take lunch at a little tea-shop in Baker Street. The waitress there was friendly, and had before now been able to recommend a woman, who had been competent and honest, but whose family duties or necessities had in two cases at least proved too importunate for other more paying but less important work.

"Mrs. Cawke has given me notice," said Miss Paul, when the waitress, who was also manageress of the little shop, brought the cup of coffee and roll and butter she had ordered.

"I was afraid she would, miss," said the waitress, who was fresh-faced in spite of the number of hours' standing her day's work involved. "A hasty-tempered woman. She's come here on occasions to clean out Saturdays, and she told me she found it very hard to

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work for an old maid. Not that she has much to talk about; her family's been a terrible trouble—husband and children and one thing and another. Soured her. Plenty like that. Mrs. Martin——"

"Can you tell me of some one else?" Miss Paul gently interrupted. "There's so little to be done, and I can afford so little, you know."

"Pooh, miss, there's plenty as 'ud be glad of the bit extra so easily come by. Mrs. Martin now, as I was saying, she's a different pair of shoes. Some sours. She sweetens. And adversity—well, I get her whenever I can, I tell you that. You'd say, wouldn't you, there'd not be difference in cleaning out a place who did it? Well, you don't know what clean is till you've seen her at a job, and in half the time. Her daughter's at work here now, though we shan't keep her long, I fear. We've been taken over by the public-house next door, and every scrap o' food has to be fetched, as it's wanted, across the yard. The time it wastes, and the running to and fro, to

say nothing of it not being nice in wet weather! The boss wants his money's worth, and that's right enough, but not the way to get it, that isn't. Janie won't stop, and no blame to her; nor will any self-respecting girl or woman, so he'll lose in the end. Sharp ways and suspecting doesn't even pay."

Miss Paul had come early to find the manageress disengaged, but a customer came in at that moment, and soon the room began to fill. The manageress found time to say when Miss Paul paid her fourpence—

"If you could come in at three you could see the daughter; we're slack then, and she'd tell you if her mother could come. I rather think she wants a job, her mother does. And thank you, miss," she added, seeing the two pennies put under the delicate shadow of the plate.

So Miss Paul returned at three, and saw Mrs. Martin's daughter—a glad-eyed, erect girl, pleasantly proud of herself, who was sure her mother would be pleased to come.

"She'll call round this evenin' 'bout nine, if that'll soot."

And at nine Mrs. Martin came.

To Miss Paul a visitor of any description was of extreme rarity at any time of day, and this was actually the first time during the tenancy of her rooms that any one had come in the evening. Her bell, with a brass plate engraved with her name underneath it, was just above the bell and plate of Dr. Paveley, and each bell rang outside the door of their respective rooms. Mrs. Martin rang the right bell, but the doctor, expecting a guest, mistook, as Miss Paul feared he might, the sound; and she did not overtake him until they were both in the hall.

"I think it's for me," she said; but Dr. Paveley took no notice. He may not have heard, as she was on the last turn of the stairs. Miss Paul stopped under the incandescent light in the hall. Dr. Paveley opened the door. He was very angry at having Miss Paul's presence in the house intruded upon him again, and his temper, after having shared the mouse's restlessness during the previous night, was not fit to bear any strain.

"What can I do for you, my good woman?" he asked.

"Name o' Miss Paul?" asked Mrs. Martin, startled at thus suddenly seeing a middle-aged and angry gentleman.

"What do you say?"

He wilfully refused to hear, and Mrs. Martin, raising her voice, repeated with the utmost distinctness—

"Name of Miss Paul, I said."

The owner of the name could not move from her station under the incandescent light. There was something about the doctor's petulance which frightened her and irresistibly amused her. He seemed to her a very old man in everything but in this petulance, which made him momentarily resemble a very naughty boy. As she stood there, it flashed through her mind how easy it would be to step forward and clear up the difficulty; but no resolution for the little deed came, and the innumerable number of projects was joined by another little member, whose hope of blossoming into a full-blown deed was dwindling.

"If you had been at the pains to look, you would have observed that under each bell had been inscribed," began the doctor, in his clearest, most withering manner; but Mrs. Martin, not easily withered, interrupted him—

"Which I was careful to read before I rang."

"The names," continued the doctor, "of the different occupants of the house, and you would not have pressed the wrong bell."

His tone was final, was that of a man who says the last word, the word which Dr. Paveley considered his right on even graver matters of fact. He turned, but Mrs. Martin remarked with emphasis—

"Beggin' your pardon, it was the right bell I rang—the top 'un."

Dr. Paveley ignored her remark, and bowing a dignified "good evening" to Miss Paul he proceeded slowly to mount the stairs with an expression of pain upon his face; but, as on the Sunday of his first encounter with Miss Paul, only the day before, dignity was taken from him. A young man's head peered into

the light round the half-open door, and a boisterous voice cried out as the young man's body rushed through the hall—

"Hullo, uncle! having a party? Don't turn your back on your loving nephew. How are you, old uncle?" he went on, beating Dr. Paveley upon the back, and, before his uncle could remonstrate, "How do you?" he said to Miss Paul, and gripped her hand in his.

"Come upstairs, Rupert," said the doctor, sternly, "and behave in as seemly a fashion as is possible to you."

"My mistake, if it's not a party," said the young man, and as he followed his uncle's broad back up the stairs he smiled regretfully at Miss Paul, who hastened forward to speak to Mrs. Martin, and did not hear the young man add "She's ripping."

"I'm Miss Paul," she said; "please come in."

"Funny sort of an old gentleman, that," said Mrs. Martin, pleasantly.

"Yes. I live in the rooms at the very top of the house," said Miss Paul, and led the way up the stairs.

Mrs. Martin scrutinised the rooms with the eye of an expert, and Miss Paul quailed under the scrutiny like an amateur, waiting for the judgment.

"Lord! you'd say the thing was alive and grinnin'," exclaimed Mrs. Martin with a jump, as her eye fell on the small chair. "Did you ever see such a littl' ole curios'ty? The likes of that now!" and "Love me!" she added on a chuckle to herself.

Miss Paul, as she looked at the woman, instinctively liked her. Mrs. Martin had her daughter's glad eyes and open face. She was a small woman, and stood with her shoulders back and her arms resting comfortably on what was once her waist.

"Four shillin's a week, and I don't come on Sundays—never 'ave," she pronounced. "And what time of a morning?"

"About half-past eight?"

"Make it a quarter to nine. Then I can see me boys ready for school and have little Amy dressed, and 'ave a bit o' breakfast, though I can't be eatin' meself till me work's done."

"That'll do very well," said Miss Paul, wondering how many children the woman had and how much work she got through between morning and night.

"We'll make it look a bit better between us, I think," said Mrs. Martin. "I 'ate a dirty mantelpiece—the less to be done the worse some does it. And I've been to places filthy in dirt—filthy!—and cleaned it up all nice and proper, and then they've said, 'Oh, we can do for ourselves now,' after I've 'ad all the 'ard work of gettin' it clean and not 'ad a chance o' keepin' it clean. That comes 'ard."

"I shall want you, as far as I know, for a long time," Miss Paul assured her.

"Till-death-us-do-part sort of thing; I see, and thank you, and your place 'll look like a little pickture. You wait and see!"

"I hope that perhaps you might do for the gentleman downstairs, you could make quite a good thing of it then; but he's peculiar, and likes to keep very much to himself, I believe."

"He's afraid of yer, miss. See, if I did his rooms, I'd talk with you about his 'abits and things, and you'd kind of get to know 'im. There's a many like that. Secret. But we'll see; and anyhow, I'm glad o' the work you can give me, bein' reg'lar, and I'll come to-morrow—a quarter on nine—and see a bit where things is."

And Mrs. Martin departed, leaving Miss Paul amused at the idea that Dr. Paveley feared her. Funnily enough, however, Dr. Paveley's boisterous young visitor expounded the same theory to his uncle, after twitting him with much irreverence on his lack of gallantry. And the more sternly the doctor endeavoured to silence him, the more solemnly this preposterous nephew wagged his head over the seriousness of what he called his uncle's case.

"It's that surprising streak of white hair curving up from her forehead and her funny nose that have done for you. Uncle mine, introduce me, and I'll put in a good word for you, upon my honour."

"Your behaviour is in the highest degree unseemly and your remarks are impertinent," answered Dr. Paveley.

"Forgive me!" said his nephew, with infamous tenderness, "for having touched lightly upon such sacred ground. Your whole manner should have warned me."

"You are an impertinent young jackanapes!" fumed the doctor. "And I must ask you," he went on, to his nephew's delight, "not to speak of your ridiculous ideas to any one. They are most unseemly and highly disagreeable to me."

"What do you take me for?" cried his nephew, with earnestness. "The beautiful secret shall remain between ourselves."

Dr. Paveley seemed somehow caught in a ridiculous net. That even a foolish young man should link him and Miss Paul together for a moment in his mind or speech as a joke, increased and, as it were, materialised his dread of the single woman who lived above him Supposing the disease had touched him, like a mischievous spirit, and this was the beginning

of an obsession created in the mind by a woman's form—which terms approximated to his definition of love. The supposition was horrible. It did not possess even the illusion of pleasure. He must not let such a thing gain upon his thoughts. Or had he become a tool in some one else's hands? He saw the amused expression upon the woman's face. Was it possible that she had some subtle power, that she knew of this power, and was exerting it over him? Flummery! Flummery! Flummery! A sleepless night was playing the deuce with him.

His nephew left. Dr. Paveley went straight to bed. And there in his bedroom, crouched under the wardrobe, was waiting the mouse, who, nourished by the doctor's bootlaces and the crumbs of his vespertinal biscuit, had passed on the whole a pleasant day of sleep and exploration. Frightened by the light and by the heavy step of a man, he remained crouching until all was dark and still, and the doctor was dropping asleep; then he screwed up his courage and began

his scuffling efforts to find an exit in the wainscot.

Again the doctor did not sleep. He thought much and variously, but never guessed the Fates' decree that a charwoman and a mouse—fantastic emissaries of Aphrodite—should be the chief agents in luring him to the edge of a ruinous fall.

* * * * *

So this dance of circumstance began for the two people who had lodged placidly, one above the other, in a humdrum-looking house in a humdrum crescent that faces the noisy Marylebone Road. Some power had set the dance in motion over their unsuspecting heads; or perhaps it would be truer to say over the head of the lady: the poor doctor was really caught in the reflex of the movement; and he, after being spun round in a turn or two, was dropped into his historical routine again a little the giddier for his rotatory experience.

IV

DR. PAVELEY deliberately took the next step on his own initiative. Impelled partly by a boy's bravado to show to himself how little he cared in daylight for his night's terrors of a witch's enchantments, and partly by a desire to obtain a mouse-trap as speedily as possible, he ascended the stairs, and tapped at the nearest of the three doors that were shut before him. It was immediately opened.

"Here *is* the gentleman from the underneath," cried Mrs. Martin, as though they had been expecting the unprecedented fact of his visit.

The welcome unmanned him, like a blow in the waist. He surrendered to the capable voice of Mrs. Martin, begging him to step this way, please—a thing which he had decided

on no account to do—and followed her into the little sitting-room. Miss Paul rose from her desk, at which she had been sitting, and advanced to meet him with outstretched hand, which he silently, and as he thought foolishly, accepted in his.

"How fortunate!" said Miss Paul, colouring. "I wanted to speak to you."

His heart sank, and he noticed the streak of white hair curving up from her forehead, and the funny nose, according to his nephew's description. Mrs. Martin, her arms resting on what was once her waist—her habitual attitude—inspected him with a sort of authority, none the less painful to him that it was gained by only one "doing" of the room in which he stood.

"Madam," he enunciated, "I have come to ask you for the loan of a mouse-trap." The words in which he put his very natural request had an unbecoming tilt of absurdity about them—a crooked bonnet has the same effect on the head of a respectable old lady.

"Oh, Faust," said Miss Paul, "has he been

disturbing you ? I am sorry. I ought not to have let him loose."

"May I ask," said the doctor, and indignation helped him to recover his assurance—"may I ask you, madam, if you do keep tame mice as pets, not to allow the disgusting little animals to escape from their cages or wherever you may be ill-advised enough to keep them."

"No," said Miss Paul, "I don't keep any mice exactly, only——"

"Such an idea ! " said Mrs. Martin, affably.

"Perhaps you could call," Dr. Paveley coughed angrily—"could call him home."

"No, I——" Miss Paul prayed that her gravity might not leave her. "He disturbed me and I caught him. Only I let him go again."

"Soft 'earted like me," said Mrs. Martin, with full understanding.

"Let him—it—go," said Dr. Paveley, feeling vaguely he had been the butt of some practical joke.

"But I should be pleased to lend you my trap," hastily put in Miss Paul.

"Two sleepless nights, madam, have been the result."

"Poor Faust!" she was constrained to murmur.

"You'd 'ave said with all them cats," Mrs. Martin thought, as it were, aloud, "there'd 'ave been no mice, at any rate, whatever else there might 'a' been."

"I'll fetch the trap," said Miss Paul.

"Need to be 'andy to set 'em nice. You'd best let me——" and Mrs. Martin turned into the kitchen, saying as she disappeared, "It lies on the bottom shelf."

"Thank you," Dr. Paveley comprehensively remarked.

"Oh, Dr. Paveley, I wanted to speak to you," began Miss Paul, and hesitated, as Mrs. Martin returned with the trap in her hand and cheerfully held it out to the doctor.

"Here it is," she said to him, "and quite at 'ome already ain't we?" she said to Miss Paul.

Rather lamely he took the trap, and rather gingerly he held it between thumb and

first finger, inspecting it out of a kind of courtesy. He stood with it in his hand and racked his brains for an apt allusion to the most famous of all mouse-traps, but getting no further than a mournfully facetious "Hamlet's thing," sniffed deferentially at it, more in the way of a lap-dog than of a terrier, for no very intelligible reason.

"In workin' order?" queried Mrs. Martin, and, stepping forward, she in a businesslike manner pressed the spring up and down, helping the doctor's hold on the trap with her own hand, and finally letting it snap with an approving "All right," she took her place in the odd trio in her habitual attitude.

"I don't take to them patent things. Supposed to kill 'em outright, but catches 'em by the tail or leg, which, as often as not, breaks. Unsatisfact'ry. Crool too."

She tightened her arms to her sides—the movement a stage sailor makes when he "hists" up his breeches.

"What I wanted to say——" Miss Paul gently began again, but could not continue,

confronting as she did the inert doctor with the mouse-trap still in his hand.

The poor man's initiative had entirely gone by this time ; no vestige of any will remained to him. Mrs. Martin would almost have been obliged to push him quietly from the room before he could have left. He could not even—which was fortunate for his immediate self-esteem—realise his state. He began to smile, and there was no meaning in his smile. It expressed nothing but vacancy. The firelight danced on the grotesque face of Loki, but the small chair did not creak.

So Mrs. Martin laughed comfortably and took that difficulty, as she was in the habit of taking most difficulties, upon herself.

"Miss Paul here, and me, we'd been thinking as there ain't no sense in havin' two women like me about the place, gettin' in each other's way, when it's one woman's job by rights easy, and you havin' no objection that I'd better see to yer wants and things. I could do for yer both, and keep yer both more comfortable than you'd ever been afore. And

it all fits in nice, as I know them pore landladies with their cats and all has only temp'ry help, and you c'u'd give me a try and see 'ow it suited. To say nothing of it being worther my while to take both jobs, and it's only fair to consider all parties like and be accom'dating, if you'll 'scuse me for 'aving spoke."

"I see no objections," answered Dr. Paveley after a short silence, during which within him there was a faint flutter of resistance to the long-feared plan, now suddenly, as he somehow felt, forced upon him, and then, with the ghost of a less negative smile upon his face, he added to Miss Paul, "I even venture to see advantages."

The exact nature of the advantages was not forthcoming, but the words had a faint sound of a compliment, a frail and distant compliment, which touched Miss Paul's delicate hearing oddly and pleasantly. She forgot his years of cantankerous objection and softly said—

"How very nice of you!"

"And all this while if he's not been holdin' the trap!" remarked Mrs. Martin. "Give it

me, and I'll start in this very minute as is by settin' it."

She took the trap away from him. Instinctively she treated him as experience had led her to treat all men — as beings radically irrational and helpless, bigger than babies and less easy to humour. She would say as much to another woman without a trace of injury in her voice (she was too busy to be bitter), and would always add, "I've learn'd my boys to be 'andy in the 'ouse."

Relieved of the mouse-trap, Dr. Paveley became gradually more, as they say, himself. He straitened his shoulders and pulling down his waistcoat with a sigh, held out a hand, which Miss Paul, while noticing it was slightly podgy, took.

"We're very grateful," she said.

"You exaggerate the cause for any gratitude," Dr. Paveley obscurely remarked with uneasy jocularity. "I would say——" He began to append a footnote to his observation, but the passage defeated him, and with

another vacant smile, he—a little clumsily—withdrew.

"We didn't 'alf manage him!" laughed Mrs. Martin.

The stairs did not sound under his tread; the door did not slam behind him; the leather-bound chair received his thirteen stone by slow degrees with no wheeze of expostulation; the fire burned on in spite of his protracted stare into its flames. His mind was slow to recover its normal function—was slow to arrive at any explanation of what had happened to him.

Mrs. Martin at length entered and asked for instructions.

"Instructions?" slowly said the doctor. "Ah! Yes. Breakfast—bacon." He rose and walked to his big desk with an air of pre-occupation. He did not like the woman to suppose that it was his custom to spend the morning dozing in his chair; he fingered the pages of a large book which was lying open upon his desk, and, without turning his head, said with a kind of reluctance, "And the customary cleaning operations."

"Exactly. And wages?"

The doctor put his left hand slowly through his hair, and damping a finger on his lips, turned over a page with great deliberation before he slowly spoke.

"My habitual practice is to pay nine shillings per week for the work which you will do."

"Make it ten," said Mrs. Martin, cheerfully—"a much more comfortabler sum to reckon with."

Dr. Paveley looked at the woman over his shoulder.

"I am not prepared to change my——" he began, and stopped for the word he wanted.

Mrs. Martin cheerfully repeated, "Make it ten;" and Dr. Paveley continued, in the same measured tones—

"I am prepared to pay an increment of one shilling per week."

"Thank you kindly and good mornin' to you, sir," she said, and went to find out more clearly from the landladies the nature of her future duties.

The landladies were overjoyed to hear the

good news of the doctor's relenting, and immediately, as they expressed it, took to Mrs. Martin. They gave her so many instructions about this, and warnings about that, and advice about the other, that, if Mrs. Martin had been at all easily bewildered, she would have been in bewilderment infallibly lost; but she listened pleasantly, and at length saying, "I see I shan't 'alf 'ave me hands full," went briskly upstairs to see what luck she had had with the trap. The hungry mouse had fallen an easy victim to the allurement of the cheese-rind with which the trap had been baited. He was again caught; and this time he was doomed and drowned. Though his life was thus cut abruptly short, it had exercised more influence upon the lives of other and higher creatures than is usual with the life of a mouse. He had not lived by any means in vain.

Dr. Paveley stood for some time by his roll-top desk, slowly turning with a damped finger the pages of the large book which he did not, however, read. The pinging voice of the

little clock which stood on the mantelpiece at last awoke him to the fact of his morning's duties, and of his lecture at a neighbouring college in Baker Street. He went to his bedroom to shave. There was probably only one thing that he disliked more than shaving himself, and that was being shaved ; so he invariably postponed that operation until he had been fortified by breakfast. After his face was smooth and dry, he deliberately inspected it in the looking-glass, with the same air of preoccupation that had been with him all the morning. He had never done such a thing before, and he did it as it were unconsciously ; that is to say, for no reason that he specified to himself. A man face to face with himself in the glass bears a fixed expression like that on a beach-taken photograph. Dr. Paveley saw a broad face inclining to fatness ; he saw on the curve of the cheeks an intricate tracery of little red veins under large eyes that just protruded ; he saw a high forehead, up from which was brushed hair that was becoming scanty ; he saw a longish moustache that

straggled down each corner of his mouth, and a chin that was losing its line; he saw ears with big lobes, a nose that could well be called Roman. Dr. Paveley was not the man to quail before the thought that he was obliged to live with that face always, to sleep with it, to carry it without shrinking through the streets, to stand before critical audiences with it while he lectured. He did not wonder if a man with that face could be loved for himself, nor did he go more deeply into the matter and question how far a face was an accurate expression of character. He looked, and he forlornly sighed, as a man sighs whom malign circumstance has forced to act against his will and judgment.

V

A PAUSE that endured some days followed this initial little whirl in the dance of circumstance. Mrs. Martin settled into her work so thoroughly that, as she remarked to Miss Paul, it really seemed funny to think of the time she hadn't been there. She attacked dirt with the vigour of a man who is fighting in a blood-feud ; all the enemy's insidious advances she knew by long experience, and foiled them by patience and forethought. Miss Paul learned the meaning of the word "clean," as her friend in the tea-shop had suggested that she would. Otherwise her life resumed its old course a little more pleasantly, owing to the vitality of Mrs. Martin's service.

Her days were always very fully occupied. She liked to pay her regular tribute of admiration

to all the beautiful things in London—St. Paul's, the Abbey, the old City churches, the pictures at the National and the Tate Galleries, the treasures in the museums, and when the day promised a fine sunset, she often walked on to Westminster Bridge to get its full splendour. In all the array of beauty within her reach she took a child's proprietary interest and joy. Her sensibility did not become dulled, nor had she any desire to express to any one else the feelings which different things aroused in her. She never questioned her purpose or felt that she was storing energy for no purpose. The joy she took from one thing helped her to enjoy another thing more, and she relished joy for its own sake without thinking about it. Supposing in such a life as she had led there had been a grain of envy, her life would have been spoiled. Even such a small thing as the thought, how much pleasanter her life would be if she could afford to rent the large room in which the doctor lived, or could afford more comfortable seats in more concerts, would have poisoned her existence, and made her joy

desperate and not glad-hearted. But discontent of any kind was absolutely foreign to her nature. To have asked her what her reason was for living would have been as wise to ask that question of a child who was picking daisies in the sun. Age had brought Miss Paul increased will and intelligence to enjoy without robbing her of her child's spontaneity. So she read, for instance, with deep understanding about the wonder of the human body and of human beings—that was all as full of meaning to her as a fairy tale, but when she read such lines as "I could go and live with the animals" she put down the book with a little frown of perplexity, until she remembered the womenfolk of some of her brother's friends, who seemed to find little pleasure in anything except their own or their children's ailments and the troubles of housekeeping. Or perhaps they had great secret joys of which they were unable to speak to herself, even as she was unable to speak of her joys to them; and the troublesome details were the only subjects of conversation available in her company.

She herself wrote occasional fairy stories, in which Loki played a prominent part, and still more occasional verses. Once, when she arrived to find that all the cheapest seats to a series of orchestral concerts were sold, the thought had seriously come to her to sell her hair, which was very long, but she had never thought of selling her stories.

Dr. Paveley, during these days of pause, continued his work. He was finishing a paper in which he proved England reached its high position in spite of Elizabeth's influence. In a slight digression he showed conclusively that all the great men of the time wrote their sonnets to her and others as studies in irony, to express their contempt and dislike for the woman to whom the poems were addressed. A great point was made in the paper by the insertion of a hitherto undiscovered fact: that Shakespeare's mother was engaged in a law-suit at Stratford-on-Avon before William Shakespeare himself came of age. Only a scholar can realise the importance of such a discovery. To the lay mind it sounds sufficiently insignificant.

But theories that have been painfully constructed from a lifetime's research may be dismantled by it, and conjectures which would alter the whole complexion of a reign's history may by it be set in motion. The paper was, of course, written round this new fact, and in the doctor's hands it incidentally bore the weight of added proof for all the doctor's opinions.

As he worked at the paper his dislike of Elizabeth became oddly interwoven with his dislike and fear of Miss Paul, so that many passages rang with the shrill note of a personal animus. The woman, indeed, obsessed his mind, and the hatred, which he opposed to this obsession, had solely the effect of increasing its volume. Into the commonest details of his daily life her appearance somehow found its crafty way. Chiefly perhaps he wondered with angry resentment what she did all day and all the evenings. Tentative remarks to the discreet Mrs. Martin elicited no information. The woman merely smiled in a way which forced the doctor to add that it was really not a matter of the slightest interest to him. He

came very near to trying to shake that fact into the woman's dull brain ; but like a man in a swamp, the more he struggled the deeper he sank. He was conscious that Mrs. Martin was beginning to take a womanly interest in his state. She served up his bacon with a kind of tenderness, as though her presence might aggravate the wound caused by another's absence. This state of things afflicted him even more than a boil on the back of his neck, because no remedy which he knew of existed for its appeasement. It seemed pathetic that a man should have lived forty years in content and quiet, to be tripped up in respectable middle age by a ridiculous woman who lived in the attics above him. This painful anomaly, however, as he was obliged to confess, had happened to him. Soon it came about that he could not write about Elizabeth without actually seeing her with a streak of white hair curving up from the centre of her forehead, and a funny, yes, a funny nose. There was no alleviation to this dismal prospect which he saw awaiting him. She might even be unable, for all that

he absolutely knew, to relieve him from the awkward quandary in which the tying of a dress-tie invariably placed him. With such a burden why should he saddle himself? Why should he, who was a careful worker, a respected historian, who was up to this painful moment quite singularly complete in himself, why should he of all living men be constrained to a proposal of marriage? The affair was too occult, too irresistible, too dreadful to summon even the grimmest smile to his face. The thing, indescribable as it was, had to be. Already within the last two days he had twice found himself at the foot of the stairs leading to the hateful little room in which he knew that the woman was sitting. Twice with a start he had come to himself in the nick of time, and had returned to his leather-bound chair with a cold sensation on his spine, and drops of sweat pricking out from his forehead. He had never subjected himself to any form of mesmerism, but he felt the victim of some occult power more and more strongly manifested. A simple explanation might certainly be that the obsession

had gained complete hold of his mind; or, most simply, that he was, as they loosely say, in love, and in love for the first time. A simple fact may often be too cruel for the most resolute man to face. His nephew—that preposterous young man—would have explained it all pat enough. The avuncular eye regarded love as a disease; therefore love came to the uncle in the guise of a disease, and heaven ought to be thanked for this convincing and personal proof of all the uncle's theories. For the obsession intruded upon what the poor man had of imagination, and set it wildly at work on imaginary conversations, in which the gibes of mockers were met by no silencing retort.

Suddenly one evening—it was six days since his loan of the mouse-trap, six long unendurable days of ceaseless, ineffectual struggle—he leapt to his feet, and, flinging back his head with the solemnity of a grand opera singer in the second act's crucial moment, advanced to the door. A great idea had come to him. He would go and see the woman. She must conceal some

horrible defect—a squint, the loss of a finger, some little personal habit, which would vanquish the ridiculous enchantment and give him back his liberty. He did not stop to think that she was in all conscience odious enough to him already. A prayer was in his heart, as he stepped up the stairs, that he might actually—the doctor's stress must excuse the unpleasantness of his prayer—see the woman crack the joints of her fingers. He did not wait to knock, but opened the door, and stood, as Miss Paul started round in considerable alarm, holding the handle of the door in his hand.

"What is the matter?" she cried, rising quickly.

Dr. Paveley's appearance gave her the most natural cause for the gravest anxiety—that his room was in flames; that a burglar had leaped in at the window; that a ghost had appeared to him. He was breathing heavily; his hair was in slight disorder; he clasped and unclasped the fingers of his free hand.

"What is the matter?" she cried again. "How can I help you?"

Dr. Paveley slowly closed the door, and advanced into the room.

"Materially," he said in his blandest manner, "by allowing me, madam, to enter and to enjoy the privilege of a short conversation with your good self."

"By all means," shyly said Miss Paul. "Please sit down."

"Thank you, madam, for your kindness. Permit me," he added, somewhat tardily perhaps, as he took his seat—"permit me to apologise for thus intruding upon your privacy. When, however, you have learned the importance of what I am about to say, I am convinced that you will readily, and I venture to hope gladly, forgive this—this intrusion upon . . . upon your privacy."

"Not at all. Oh! not at all," Miss Paul hastily murmured, and stooped to rake the grey ashes out of the fire.

If the doctor's visit had been actuated by much the same feeling as forces a man to precipitate himself from a dizzy height, or to fling himself at a swiftly passing train, that

impulse disappeared in the presence of the feared woman herself. Miss Paul's own obvious nervousness put the good doctor at ease with himself. He became pleasantly master of the situation, and pleasantly, as the phrase is, at home. A sober relaxation took the place of the severe strain of the past days. He spread out his hands before the fire. He saw, as business men say of their interviews, the line to take—and took it.

"It has occurred to me, my dear madam," he began, smoothing the warmth into his hands—"it has occurred to me that we have erred on the side of, what I may call, exclusiveness—that much is to be said for pleasant interchange . . . for agreeable social amenities. We might, we might spend an occasional pleasant evening, many pleasant evenings, perhaps, in pursuing the . . . what I may call the lighter sociabilities. Backgammon, now—may I inquire if you have ever played backgammon?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Miss Paul, "play backgammon."

"Or chess?" continued the doctor, with an encouraging wave of his hand. "Many a long hour might be beguiled by a study of the openings, and by an occasional application of those careful theories in a pitched and peaceful battle."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Miss Paul, "play chess either."

"Then there is the simpler but scarcely less engrossing game of draughts."

"Nor draughts," said Miss Paul.

"My hands are constitutionally incapable of manipulating cards with any dexterity, but I believe several games exist, in which two people can find distraction from——"

"I'm very stupid, I'm afraid," Miss Paul interrupted, "but I can't play any games."

"Perhaps you will allow me to instruct you in the mysteries of a game, for which I must own to a strong partiality, the most excellent game of backgammon."

"I'm so afraid I hate all games," Miss Paul was obliged emphatically to say, in spite of her fear of hurting his feelings.

"Just so," mused the doctor, "just so," and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm so sorry about the mouse," said Miss Paul, and leaned forward to sweep up the grate with the hearth-brush.

Dr. Paveley was pondering deeply. He looked at her, as if she were not there, without seeing her, and became conscious of the grotesque little chair which stood by her side. Miss Paul turned her head and saw the firelight dance across the fantastic face, and accentuate its fierce expression of life. She smiled.

"In that case," the doctor at length said, and his voice sounded as if he were speaking in his sleep, "in that case, madam, may I inquire what your views are of . . . what your views are on the subject . . . the delicate subject of . . . of marriage?"

The question dropped into her mind like a large stone into a fish-pond, and scattered her dulled thoughts in all directions. But she was glad of a topic on which she need be less drearily abrupt and negative.

"Ah, yes," she said, "marriage. So much." And she tried to catch from the helter-skelter what might most properly be considered her own view.

Dr. Paveley, again launched, regained his self-possession.

"I may add," he remarked in his normal voice, "that I do not speak out of mere curiosity—though curiosity to elicit a view so admirable, as I can readily assure myself your view must undoubtedly be, would certainly be pardonable. I speak, madam, I speak with honest intention."

So her view, Miss Paul was relieved to think, on marriage was not in immediate request. He was, in his own way, preparing for a confidence, and needed no less than a more ordinary mortal, a little sympathy, a little kindness.

"Marriage may be so beautiful," she sincerely said.

"Madam," said Dr. Paveley, "I am convinced it may."

Without pausing to clear his throat, though his voice was rather husky, he proceeded—

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"The best men desire to keep their freedom as devoutly as the best women desire to lose theirs." He coughed and extended his arm. "It is in the natural order of things. A man has his work and position, which occupy his mind and engage him in manifold interests. A woman without a husband is an incomplete thing, and I am now convinced—convinced, I will frankly own, a trifle unwillingly—that there are elements of incompleteness in a man without—without a wife. On these elements it is unnecessary—even perhaps unseemly—that I should now brood. I may, however, mention the hours after his day's work is done, when his spirit may be refreshed by the solace of those lighter amenities to which I have referred. I may mention the preparations which welcome his return home, the hearth swept, the tea ready, his slippers—in things insignificant is affectionate attention perhaps most recognisable — his slippers warmed; and the mention of these—these solicitous preparations, brings me to the wider sphere of the advantages which await a good

woman, a sensible woman. Her horizon is widened—her usefulness is increased—her position is assured. My thoughts are echoed in the works of our two greatest English poets. Does not Milton say, in 'Paradise Lost,' 'He for God only—she for God in him'? And does not Wordsworth, in one of his most inspired moments, employ the phrase, 'A ministering angel thou!'?"

"It was, I think, Sir Walter Scott, wasn't it? 'O woman! in our hours of ease,' you know," interposed Miss Paul.

"The poem to which I refer begins, if my memory serves me, 'Woman, when I behold thee flippant, vain.'"

"It really doesn't, I'm afraid; that's Keats."

"I cannot account for this extraordinary lapse in a memory of which I am not ashamed to say I am generally proud; but that Wordsworth wrote something much akin to my sentiments, I am constrained to think. We will take it, with your permission, that he did, and proceed with——"

"Oh, I know the one you mean," said Miss

Paul, quickly. "'She was a phantom of delight,' that's it. 'I saw her upon nearer view,' you know it ends, 'a spirit yet a woman too.' I always thought the great man was just a little, what shall I say, off the line—condescending perhaps, don't you think?"

"No, madam," answered Dr. Paveley, "I most certainly do not think so."

"I do," said Miss Paul, simply. Her words threw down no gauntlet of opposition, but stated a quiet fact for what it might be worth.

The doctor paused. Might not this flippancy afford abundant cause for severance? Part of his mind insisted that it did, but insisted to no purpose. He waited for a possible effect. No sensation of freedom was forthcoming, and the dissenting part of his mind made no further protest. He took a deep breath.

"Whatever may be," he continued, "the merits or demerits of that particular poem, I will, if you will allow me, proceed with my argument, without seeking for illustrations, which seem to confuse rather than to enlighten

my thesis. I have too great a respect for the common sense and intelligence to which" (the doctor waved his hand and inclined his head) "your appearance and bearing afford striking testimony, to suppose that you disagree with the general proposition which I have endeavoured to lay before you, that marriage incomparably widens the sphere of a woman's activities."

He paused. Miss Paul could not deny the fact; nor could she put into any words an undercurrent of violent disagreement, not so much with what Dr. Paveley said, but with the manner in which he said it. So she was silent. It didn't, after all, matter much whether she did or whether she didn't agree. His elaborate courtesy she took to be due to a wish, which pleased her, to make amends for the slight rudeness, by her easily understood and forgiven, which had marked his behaviour on some previous occasions. She was quite sure that he just wanted to be, as she put it to herself, nice and friendly; and any ill-success she was quick to ascribe to a lack in herself rather than in him.

Dr. Paveley, pleased by her consenting silence, resumed—

"So I have been able to express myself with tolerable accuracy on the general subject, and I flatter myself to hope that a like success awaits what I may designate the particular application."

Miss Paul made a supreme call upon her fund of kindness, and said with warm encouragement—

"I'm so longing to hear all about it."

She folded her arms and did her best to send scampering about their business the wantons who urged the drollness of her thus being the confidant of the learned doctor's affair. He could help his phraseology as little as he could help the shape of his nose. Language—the use different people made of words—was a mystery, and in mysteries of every kind, according to Miss Paul's idea, there was something sacred. She grew at once graciously solemn.

The doctor thought briefly before he moved on to the difficult ground which lay before him.

"You must forgive me, madam, if I transgress the accepted ideas—the very properly accepted ideas of—ah—modesty; and rest assured that my reasons for doing so are in the highest degree weighty. Modesty may become false when it serves to hide what I may call a greater truth."

"Oh, that is true!" Miss Paul gladly exclaimed.

"Madam, you remove all the hesitation I was inclined to feel in stating the advantages which my wife would undoubtedly enjoy. A woman who had lived for many years alone would find herself with an intelligent companion. Her interests would be singularly large; my works are commented on in every historical review of any importance in Europe and in America. I am not unknown in India and Australia. What more agreeable occupation than the neat arrangement of these tributes and criticisms in specially prepared volumes? When the future Mrs. Paveley travelled, the houses of all learned men would be thrown open to her. I should permit her, after some

slight instruction, to correct my proofs for the press—the proofs, that is to say, of my less important writings. She would be taken up in a continuous stream of gentle and womanly occupations. I need not mention the pleasures which universally accompany the wedded state —the home, the possibility of children, the household duties—all of which are dear to woman's heart, though through my years of loneliness I have myself regarded them as somewhat harassing, troublesome even."

"I'm so glad. I'm sure you'll both be very happy in your own——" She caught herself in the nick of time to change "peculiar way" with a gasp to "home." "And tell me about the lady. Who, if I may ask, is the fortunate lady?"

The doctor rose, and smiling with a large benevolence, he bowed his head and said with grave deliberation—

"I hope, very dear madam, that you yourself will be the—the fortunate lady."

Miss Paul jumped to her feet. "Me! Good gracious! I had no idea! Why didn't you

say so sooner? I'm dreadfully sorry to have let you go on and on like this. Too stupid of me. Because I couldn't possibly on any account, you know, marry you, my poor dear Dr. Paveley."

"Your surprise is as natural, dear lady, as it is becoming," he suavely said.

"I really couldn't for a moment entertain the idea;" and inconsequently she added in the same breath, "Why, I'm beginning to talk like you already." There was in her voice alarm; but he acknowledged a compliment.

He raised himself upon his toes and "More and more like me . . . my humble wish," he blandly faced her to say.

He looked absurdly, or, as Miss Paul thought, pitifully happy. His loneliness and his proposal of marriage were the only items in his quaint discourse which were real enough for her to remember. His assurance did not irritate her; it added merely, in her kind view, to the height from which she must push him—to humiliation. He stood middle-aged

and radiant before her. No comfort in the thought of the fall being good for him, in the thought of his probable inability to feel that or anything else deeply, in the thought of her own prestige, came to her. The one hateful fact that faced her, as flatly as his happy red face, was that she must hurt him. She strove wildly to find in her brains a buffer for the blow, and stammered—

"I'm so sorry; but to marry you—for me—would be, under the circumstances, quite absolutely impossible."

It had no effect.

He moved his outspread hands, and lightly expostulated—

"Dear lady, it is just the circumstances that are especially favourable; it is just the circumstances that brought home to me what I have now set my heart on. I was not foolish or indelicate enough to suppose for a moment that you would, if you will pardon the expression, leap into my arms. Your reluctance is truly and nobly feminine. In the highest degree I honour your irresolution."

"No, no, no," she almost wailed.

But he took no heed. He stepped back to find room, as it were, to expatiate. Only a hand pressed tightly over his mouth could have then stopped the utterance of thoughts and feelings long exiled from his mind and heart. Through tears, that did not drop, Miss Paul distinctly saw the stunted spirit of his youth peer out from his eyes. Like something that had nothing to do with his uncouth body and his pompous words and his unblushing assurance, it peered at her, a poor ill-used thing, and entreated her for pity, like a maimed child asking for food.

"A man himself feels great reluctance before a complete change in his way of life. My own reluctance, increased by years of quiet habit, was comically intense. To the odd feelings that overmastered me I was even inclined to attribute a supernatural agency; the vision of you, dear Miss Paul, haunted me like an obsession, and I fought hard to keep myself in the bondage of my familiar loneliness. But I was obliged to capitulate,

and my capitulation has shown me, if you will pardon the exaggeration, the expansive demesne of freedom, and I am constrained to look back with contempt and with something akin to actual loathing, to the prison-house I formerly occupied. My income will be amply sufficient to obtain for us such homely comforts as we may desire; with the renewed energy that glows within me, I am confident it may even be substantially increased."

"Please stop, please stop," cried Miss Paul.

"Should you desire to approach slowly the threshold, as it were, of matrimony, we could continue to live much as we are now living —I mean in these same rooms—and I could continue to save, as I have now for some years been saving, a considerable portion of my income; and then we might remove to a small but commodious villa in St. John's Wood where, in addition to the advantages I have already enumerated, you might enjoy the delights of a small garden, in which blossoms could be cultivated and the hardier

varieties of fruits grown. I flatter myself our life would be idyllic, Elysian. Rightly, indeed, right aptly you described my future wife as a fortunate lady."

"I had no idea you were thinking of me. I can't marry you—ever. I can't marry you. Please understand me. It's quite impossible *for me* to marry you."

She could not take her eyes from his face, which remained to all perceptions but hers as happy and red as ever. But she saw the poor stunted spirit fade slowly away and disappear from his eyes, and it wrung her heart to see it.

The learned man, however, took conscious pleasure in doing the exactly right thing, as he said—

"In your present state of agitation, dear madam, it is seemly that I should withdraw. I retire the more gladly that I am confident your meditations must on this occasion be fraught with ultimate pleasure, and, I may add, our mutual—advantage."

He swept away her last remonstrance with a ceremonious little bow, and left the room,

closing the door softly behind him. Miss Paul listened to his careful descent of the dark, rather steep, stairs. Her feelings swayed oddly between tears and laughter.

"Had you anything to do with this, you bad old Loki?" she at last said in a very soft voice. "So that's my first proposal of marriage! I ought to be flattered. But the poor little shrunken, withered thing that peered out! The sadness of it!"

She walked to the window, and moving the curtain on one side, looked out at the moon that was shining over the many miles of houses and all the tumult of the streets.

"Why did you make me see it?" she said; and there was in her voice a note of delicate sorrow which was very characteristic of her gentle personality.

VI

NEXT morning Miss Paul waited some time before she came to the conclusion that something had occurred to prevent the admirable Mrs. Martin from coming. Something serious, she very much feared. Mrs. Martin was not the kind of woman whom a trifle would keep from work; nor did Miss Paul look forward to a bleary-eyed avowal of a cold to which spirit-smelling breath gave the lie, and to which she was becoming sadly accustomed. Her liking and trust of the woman had steadily increased into a real affection. She was distressed to think of bad causes for her absence, and amused to confess a slight disappointment in not having the sympathetic ear for her eventful news. Just to mention the fact of Dr. Paveley's proposal would have

been as pleasant as to hear Mrs. Martin's comments.

She was beginning to make her bed when the tapping of one of the landladies — the Misses Jones—sounded apologetically on the door. The timid little lady entered. Beside her Miss Paul seemed robust.

"Good morning, Miss Paul. Won't you let me help you?" she said.

"That would be nice and kind of you," Miss Paul cheerfully answered. "Turning a mattress by myself hurts the tips of all my fingers."

"I'm sure it's most troublesome about these women." Miss Jones spoke in a soft faltering voice, and each word came by itself from her lips, with a little struggle for its utterance.

"Oh, well," said Miss Paul, "Mrs. Martin's the right sort, Miss Jones, I'm sure."

"I am so glad you think she is. It's most troublesome, though Dr. Paveley took it most kindly, I will say, when I prepared his breakfast."

"So I'm sure he should."

Miss Jones gave a diffident little smile. "And he asked me to give you this"—her voice faltered more timorously—"which I have taken the liberty of leaving in the entrance."

She hastily left the room for "this," which was two bunches of violets, wrapped carefully in tissue paper. The pleasure Miss Paul felt in the flowers was modified by the fear that acceptance of them would surely encourage the persistent giver. Yet to refuse to accept them from the timorous intermediary would be unkind and silly.

"How very nice of him," she said, "and of you to give me such great help!" she added, noticing that Miss Jones hovered by the door.

Miss Jones made repeated efforts to smile, and went away.

Miss Paul put the violets in water, and immediately sat down to write to thank Dr. Paveley and clinch her refusal.

"Dear Dr. Paveley," she wrote, "Thank you very much for sending me the violets. Violets are almost my favourite flowers. Please

understand that I cannot ever marry you." (That was surely clear enough.) "This is no kittenish modesty, but my unalterable determination." (She carefully scratched out "kittenish," and wrote "womanly" over the obliteration; she smiled at the long last words, but let them stand.) "I am glad to think you are really in love with the idea of marriage, and that I am only an accident. Many really nice women would not only be honoured, as I am, by your proposal, but would be able to accept it, which I am not. Bear me no ill-will, and teach——" She stopped. No, she could not learn backgammon. She scratched through the "and teach," put a big full-stop after "ill-will," and signed herself "sincerely" in full "CONSTANTIA PAUL."

She had just finished addressing the envelope, which she determined to send through the post, in order that her words might come from a greater distance and with more authority, when her bell rang loudly. She hurried down-stairs to open the door. A very small boy, gnome-like and surprising, stood on the step.

With his hands behind him, and his head tilted farther back than a collar would have allowed, he immediately began to speak in a loud quick whisper, induced by shyness and a cold.

"I'm sent to say as Mrs. Martin's too bad to cometer work, and she's sorry."

"So am I," said Miss Paul, looking down on the diminutive boy, who kept gazing at her. "And who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Martin's fith son, Johnny Martin, please."

"I hope your mother's not seriously ill?"

"Doctor come. Took orf 'is coat. See 'is white apron thro' the key'ole. 'Is black bag too. Ain't no baby in it this time. Orf school t' run errans." He poured out his words in an elfin whisper, too breathless for expression.

Miss Paul felt, as the meaning of the little boy's words became clear to her, very much as she would have felt if in walking over a moor she had come suddenly upon a sheer declivity, which opened out to her view a wide and undreamed-of landscape. It startled

her; and the effect of the shock was to make her more surely herself—that is to say, more actively gentle and understanding.

"Where does your mother live, dear?" she asked.

"20, Nun'on Place."

"Where is that?"

"Eh?"

"Whereabouts?"

"Chapelseet."

"Where's that?"

"Hedgware 'Oad."

"Here's a penny for you, Johnny. Good morning."

"Goo'morning, Miss Paul," he said, and raced away.

Her name, coming from the little gnomish boy, had a comical sound.

Shyness teased her, but did not weaken her resolution to go and see Mrs. Martin. She went up and dressed, and came down again without, to her extreme satisfaction, meeting Dr. Paveley. In the crescent she passed a man in a grey suit, wearing a grey

felt hat, whose face she seemed to recognise. She had seen him, oddly enough, once in Westminster Abbey and once in the National Gallery—oddly, because Miss Paul was not in the habit of noticing or remembering faces. Frequent inquiries brought her, through many dingy streets, to Nunton Place. The Place was a lop-sided street, with a long block of tenement houses, high and not so spruce as those near what was once the Imperial Theatre. The street seemed lop-sided to Miss Paul because these tenements were faced by a blank, red wall. A great number of children were in the street—children, as Miss Paul thought, of every age. But she thought so wrongly; there were only girls minding children too young to go to school. Women stood in the doorways, taking a snatch of talk with a neighbour or giving an eye to a child. They thoroughly looked at Miss Paul, as she passed, in an impersonal and not unpleasant way. She thought most of them appeared to have just a little more to do in the day than they could manage to get done. From the door

of Number 20, a girl was pulling a perambulator: the wheels had lost their tyres, and grated harshly on the stone pavement.

"Does Mrs. Martin live here?" Miss Paul asked.

The girl stared crossly at her, not moving the perambulator further out of the entrance, which it exactly blocked.

"Firs' floor," she said, and "Martins" she suddenly screamed at the top of a piercing voice.

"Let me help you," suggested Miss Paul.

"It's done now," said the girl, giving the perambulator a jerk on to the back wheels and a swift turn. "They'll 'ave 'eard," she added.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Paul, and hastened to the foot of the stairs. The unceremonious shout, which heralded her approach, made her acutely shy. When she was halfway up the stairs a door opened, and a man's voice cried out, "Who is it?" and Miss Paul hurrying up on to the landing answered, "It's me."

She saw a short stout man standing in the doorway; a little girl was clinging round his left knee.

"I'm Miss Paul."

"It's yer missus cometer see yer, Sophie," said the man, and picking up the child he limped in and held the door open, so that Miss Paul was able to pass by the foot of the bed which just left space for the door to open, and on which Mrs. Martin was lying.

"Glad to see yer, Miss Paul," said Mr. Martin. "We've 'eard a lot about yer."

A flicker of a smile passed over his wife's face as she said—

"You're very welcome, Miss Paul."

"I am so sorry you're ill," said Miss Paul.

"Ill! I should think I was," said Mrs. Martin, in an exhausted voice. "The pains took me somethin' shockin' in the night. It do seem there ain't no sense in this go. Not that we've exactly room for another little 'un, as you see. I was that bad I 'ad to 'ave the doctor all the same. No confinement nor

nothin' : didn't even know, and that's a fack. We women——"

"Not so much jawering, Sophie. Ain't no use in that at any rate, speshly when you're weak as a 'alf-drownded cat."

"I am that," said Mrs. Martin, and added, with a faint smile of something very like pride, "He don't like other folks to jawer 'xcept hisself, Mr. Martin don't."

"What a dear little girl you have!" said Miss Paul, turning to Mr. Martin, who still held the child in his arms.

"Ah!" said Mr. Martin, "she is so."

"He takes wonnerful to the littlest," commented Mrs. Martin.

"Now then, Agnes, say how dyer do to the lady."

The little girl held her arms more tightly round her father's neck, and tried to hide her face in his scarf, from which a whispered "How dyer do" came.

"Show the lady yer face," insisted the man, "can't yer?" and he tickled her side very gently with his thick, red hand.

"Let her be then, George. She's a terrible one for bein' shy, is little Aggie, ain't she Grannie? That's Grannie." An old woman with bright white hair bobbed by the door, which she had opened out of the adjoining room. "We've comp'ny, Grannie — Miss Paul, as you've so orfen 'eard me speak of."

The old woman bobbed again to Miss Paul's smile, and went to open the door of the oven.

"Cookin' us a bit o' dinner, ain't you, Grannie? She comes in like to help a bit when I'm at work, and to give a eye to the little 'uns," explained Mrs. Martin from the bed. Her voice grew weaker as she went on talking to little Agnes, who at this moment peeped shyly round, holding the back of a small hand to her forehead.

"You didn't 'alf talk this mornin', didyer? Baby mum, baby mum. Let Aggie see baby mum. What them children notice! a gal outside saw 'is bag and told Elsie he'd brought a baby. Oh dear, oh dear, what they do get saying! But there ain't no baby this time, Aggie."

"You goes on jawering, Sophie!" said her husband, taking a step forward.

"Does me good!" said Mrs. Martin, closing her eyes.

Miss Paul leaned over her, and stroked her forehead with her hand.

"Mind you get all the rest you possibly can."

"Thankyer," said Mrs. Martin. "Not much as I can do, more's the pity. Fairly lays yer out, this do."

"Good-bye. Promise me to take great care of yourself. I'll see Dr. Paveley isn't bothered."

"How about yerself? Fair worries me, lyin' here." She opened her eyes and looked at Miss Paul with such response to the caress that the gentle lady's heart was gladdened.

"I know you'll look after her well," she turned and said to Mr. Martin.

"She's a woman in a 'undred—a thousand I'd say," he answered, limping to the door. "You don't 'alf mean to strangle me, I see," he said to the child.

"Good-bye," said Miss Paul to the old

woman, who bobbed again and smoothed down her apron. Mr. Martin was in the passage and closed the door after her.

"She's a fair terror for worryin'. B'lieve me, it was all we could do to keep 'er in bed. Worryin' 'bout 'er work, 'ood do this and 'ow that'd be, and no end to it all." He spoke in a confidential undertone.

"You must see that she doesn't get up too soon," said Miss Paul. "Of course," she added hastily, "I'll see she gets her money all right, and I'll send or bring a few little jellies and things."

"Thank yer kindly, and she's told our girl —eldest girl, Janey—to look in after 'er work and put a hand to a thing or two. She's a rare good girl, is Janey. 'Bout a quarter after seven she'll be with yer."

The door opened and the old woman appeared saying—

"Mrs. Martin forgot to say as 'ow Janey—— "

"Well, we ain't so thoughtless," interrupted Mr. Martin.

"Oh!" said Grannie, and shut the door.

He jerked his head in the direction of the room, and sniffed. Miss Paul retreated along the passage and down the stairs. Her departure roused the child to lean forward and wave her hand.

"Wave yer 'and," cried Mr. Martin.

Little Agnes leaned over the barrier which protected the passage from the steep stairs and shook her hands about violently to her father's intense pleasure, until Miss Paul with an answering wave of her arm disappeared from sight.

In the street, Johnnie the gnome-like little boy was standing; Miss Paul commandeered him to take back the things she intended to buy, and finding a large grocery near the Edgware Road, she sent him back, the elated bearer of calves-foot jelly, biscuits, and potted chicken. Many things weighed upon her mind on the way to the corner of Chapel Street. Wonder predominated—wonder at the inexplicable state of things which allowed absolute want to exist side by side with absolute

waste ; wonder at the number of Mrs. Martin's children ; wonder at the amiably gruff Mr. Martin : but the supreme wonder was that in that small room, which performed the functions of kitchen, bedroom, and living-room for too many human beings, she had unmistakably felt the presence of something, which she called to herself, beauty. The fact that human beings could bear up against such conditions so bravely as that poor sick woman filled her with a strange exaltation, and acted as a light to illumine, what seemed to her, the ignorant cruelty of those conditions. The amazing variety of life excited her so much that her cheeks flushed. She would lay by every penny she could to get the comforts which might soonest coax strength back again to Mrs. Martin. Her mind, appalled by the glimpse it had taken of the huge outrageous workings of civilisation, focussed itself, as it were, on the immediate question how much she, not a plutocrat, could help Mrs. Martin, not by any means the poorest among the poor.

Shelley had lived, she happened to remember

as she got into a waiting omnibus, chiefly upon dry bread and raisins. Concerts . . . her gloom at the thought of giving them up was suddenly dispelled by her surprise in seeing the gentleman in the grey suit and grey felt hat sit down on the end seat by the conductor. She turned quickly away, as his eye unconcernedly caught hers, and looked in front of her. Again she started. The visit to the Martins had inclined her mind towards observation, of the very poor especially, and opposite her was sitting an old man, whose appearance, as the phrase is, riveted her attention. Miss Paul had never seen a human face which expressed such misery as the face of this old man—such hopeless misery. Dirt did not obscure the delicate shape of his hands, with which he held his coat together ; there were signs of breeding in his unshaven face. His scarf was scanty, and it was apparent that he had no shirt under his coat. From time to time a convulsive shiver shook his body. She could not imagine where he had found the penny for his fare, where he could be going,

what he at all was doing. His misery crushed her. In her purse were three coppers and a sovereign. She did not think about the evils of indiscriminate charity, she did not think how she would herself manage without the money, or of the needs of the Martin family. She simply gave the man the sovereign. When he rose to get out, she took his hand, opened it, shut the gold piece in it, whispering "Buy a shirt and food." The old man's mouth opened in dumb astonishment. He hesitated a moment; Miss Paul squeezed his hand saying, "Please, please," and then he stumbled out, unable to speak a word. It all happened so quickly that she was almost sure no one had noticed her action, and if any one had she would hardly have minded. A fat, jolly-faced woman with many parcels and two children got in and sat down opposite her, on the seat which the old man had just left. The woman, as soon as she was settled, kept up a cheerful flow of talk; she was explaining to her children what a big and what a wonderful place London was. Their jolliness was a

relief to Miss Paul, even though she could only relish its reality for a few moments before she got out of the omnibus.

"That was a real noble thing to have done," said a voice in her ear, and turning, she found the gentleman in the grey suit standing by her with his hand to his grey felt hat. The intonation of his voice declared him an American. It added, "I must say—a real, noble action," with increased earnestness.

"Oh no!" Miss Paul demurred, colouring.

"So much do I think it, oh yes," the man went courteously on, "that I must thank you for it. I am obliged to thank you as people are obliged to thank a musician for having played beautifully. As wise as to have tried to dam a river with a diamond pin. But a real good deed."

"I simply had to," said Miss Paul.

"Precisely!" said the man. "Then you can perhaps pardon my speaking to you. I simply had to, as you admirably put it."

They were standing a little way inside the crescent, a few yards from the noisy stream

of traffic and people in the Marylebone Road.

"You gave the old man a yellow sovereign," he went on, "which you can ill spare, without his asking for it—oblivion for four days, perhaps five. Give me—I humbly entreat you——" He paused, and instead of looking behind her as before at the passers-by, he looked straight into her eyes, and said slowly, "Give me—your—golden—sympathy." He turned completely round on his heel and, balancing himself with both hands on his stick, continued gaily: "An unblushing beggar, demanding preposterous alms!" and then, with another change to his former solemnity, as swift as had been his change to gaiety, the surprising man said, "But will you? *Your* eyes see that I am trustworthy. Please do."

"How can I?" said Miss Paul, and added with a little laugh, "It's not so easy as a sixpence, you know, to give."

"Oh, immensely easier, dear lady. So much more depends upon me than the gently enforced closing of my hand upon a coin.

Appreciation heightens the value of this gift, and its bestowal replenishes the store in the heart from which it is taken."

"The quality of mercy, you know——" began Miss Paul, her eyes twinkling; but the man in grey actually seized her arm to emphasise his interruption, as he exclaimed—

"Its origin, with you, dear lady, as the beautiful bestower, goes deeper, farther back into the rarer, bigger power of——" he let go her arm to fling up his hand and utter with delightful eagerness, "joy, the rarest and the finest of all human qualities," and again he tossed the short word "joy" into the air, much in the way, so Miss Paul instantly thought, that a small boy might toss into the air his cap. As Chance (or one of her attendant imps) would have it, the little word fell on the head of Dr. Paveley, who, at the precise moment of its ejaculation, turned sharply round the corner of the wall which stops to make an entrance into the crescent. The doctor looked astonished and displeased to come upon the lady whom he had honoured on the previous

evening conversing thus strangely with a man, about whose very existence he had been kept, as he felt it, wrongly in the dark. The slight lifting of his hat discovered a frown, the wrinkles of which remained until, on turning with his key in the lock to see the man hand a visiting card to Miss Paul, they deepened on his forehead to furrows of wrath.

Miss Paul heard a door noisily shut as she read the name "Paul Haskins" on the card.

"My name," she said.

"I was glad to hope so," he answered.

"Why?"

He oddly moved his head a little to one side to suggest that the question was not necessary.

"But how, I mean?"

"The dumb witness of a brass plate." His voice sounded a comical note of apology for prying.

"And when?" She coloured at the discharge of her little battery of questions.

"Since first I saw you," he said. "Your wonderful face," he added as the simple fact of explanation, strong enough to destroy the

last difficulty, and he quietly repeated, "Your wonderful face."

"Oh!" said Miss Paul, "where?"

"In your National Gallery, as you passed from one to the other of my favourite pictures. I followed you home," he confessed without a blush. "I simply had to. I have followed you again and again. I simply had to. That's my only reason or excuse. When you come to think of it, it's much the best reason in all the funny catalogue for ever doing anything."

"Perhaps it is," she ventured through her amazement.

"Of course it is," he insisted; and tentatively added, "To-morrow? You allow me to call for you? At twelve, say?"

"Yes," said Miss Paul, "do."

"Ha!" He gave a short laugh that suddenly lined his solemn face with happiness, and suddenly disappeared.

"Where shall we go?" said Miss Paul.

"Where else with you," he exclaimed, as he bowed to leave her, "but to see beautiful things?"

Miss Paul was too bewildered to think, as she made her way to the door and slowly climbed the stairs to her room, which seemed to her, for all its dear familiarity, somehow to be strangely new. She stopped on its threshold and surveyed it, as though it were the home of another person, until her belongings, those ancient pieces of oak, the pictures, the room itself offered again, as she oddly felt, their old friendly welcome. With her hands clasped together at the back of her head, she stood in the middle and looked at them all with smiling eyes. Her happy inspection began and ended with the little grotesque chair, on which at length she placed her hat, saying, with a shake of her head—

"Such things, Loki, have happened. Some mischievous old thing has been playing pranks with me."

She sat down to think over the events which had come thus, tumbling on each other's heels, upon her. She saw again the home of the Martins, and Mrs. Martin lying on the bed; she saw the little gnome-like boy disappearing

round a corner, his pockets bulging ; she saw the destitute old man in the omnibus, and the fat, jolly woman with her many parcels and her two children ; she saw the extraordinary man in grey, and tried to remember if his eyes and hair were as grey as his suit and hat ; she saw Dr. Paveley and the mouse, which she had called Faust, now dead. And the mouse, as she fell gradually asleep, seemed to her in some way to have been the originating influence which had set these things to work on her—which had pushed the chip the butterfly clung to into the stream, and sent it floating down the current. Down the stream she was floating ; she felt the quick rise and dip of the chip in the bright ripples, and delighted in the slow turning as it hurried along on its way. And then she assumed her own shape, and stepping from the stream, which lapped against her ankles, she walked on the soft green turf towards a long avenue of oak trees, the branches of which were interlaced so as to form a fantastic pattern. She was not surprised to recognise them, and she was so little

surprised at the dwarfish old man who leapt out upon her, exactly as he had done before, that she spoke to him before he had time to open his wide mouth.

"Are you an old imp from the brood of Chance?" she said.

"I may be," he answered.

"Or only Loki?" she took him up.

"Wealth," he cried out, "wealth!" He flung his arms about and grew gigantic, he stamped his feet so that the whole avenue resounded with the noise, and with each stamp he shouted, "Wealth, wealth, wealth!"

"Please don't," she cried out, putting her fingers in her ears, "deafen me." And woke to find herself standing before Dr. Paveley, who was saying—

". . . knocked well, madam, well, well. Had you had the courtesy to bid me enter, it would not have been necessary."

"I must have dropped asleep, I'm afraid," said Miss Paul, blinking.

"I apologise for intruding upon your matutinal slumbers," said Dr. Paveley, angrily. "I

have come, madam, to ask you who was the man I saw you speaking with in the street."

Miss Paul was still hazy-minded from her dream, and said—

"Mr. Paul—oh yes—Mr. Paul Haskins or Hasskins. I never saw him before."

"In my opinion, madam, a woman who converses with strange men in the street, is no better than she should be."

"Are not you," she interposed, "perhaps a little ruder than you need be?"

"No, madam, under the circumstances I am not; and I consider the proposal I made you of marriage in the highest degree rash and untimely."

"It was rather, I'm afraid," Miss Paul agreed.

"And I wish to withdraw from it—though I withdraw to greater bitterness and to deeper unhappiness than was my lot before you——" His voice actually broke.

"Don't be cross," Miss Paul hastily said. "Be friendly and sensible."

"Madam," he said, "I need neither your consolation nor your advice."

Tears actually stood in his eyes. Whether they came from anger, or the heat of the fire, or grief, it is impossible to be certain.

"Oh, be friendly," she cried. But the door slammed behind him, and he was ungallantly gone.

Miss Paul went into the kitchen, and lifting the lid of the stone bread-pan, with a sigh discovered that she must fetch another loaf from the baker's. And raisins, she thought, certainly, some raisins too.

VII

OUTSIDE Baker Street station next morning a man was pasting up the large notice of a pianoforte recital. Miss Paul, on her way to Nunton Terrace, saw him slap his broad wet brush over the features of her favourite pianist, and realised that her impulsive charity precluded the possibility of her presence. Disappointment was great, but could not withstand for long the magic of spring's arrival, to which the sweet air bore glad witness. As rash and untimely, she smiled to think without regret, as the good doctor's proposal, even if the impulse sprang from a slightly different motive. Her thoughts ran on from the doctor to the possible rebirth of the former difficulty; her refusal of him might lead to his refusal to be served by the same woman. In that case Mrs. Martin

would lose much, and she herself might lose Mrs. Martin. Either emergency was deplorable and yet likely. Spring's magic, however, tempted her to complete confidence in her power of managing circumstances, however refractory they might be.

She relished the spice of an actual adventure, as the meeting with the man in the grey suit, the eccentric Mr. Paul Haskins, undoubtedly was, all the more keenly, because hitherto her adventures had been of an imaginary nature. She decked the odd encounter with the rosiest possibilities, and laughed like a child to remember how exactly the enthusiastic old man in her dream had hit the fairy-tale likelihood. As a matter of fact, Miss Paul had lived so long and so vividly in her own imaginary world that she was, without knowing it, amply prepared for the wildest experience. Indeed, a thing was real to her in nice proportion to the vigour of its appeal to her imagination. And that raises a very pretty point. How much of truth and of life lies in the isolated fact ; and how far is any fact a

dead fact, unless it be the material expression of a spiritual truth; that it flourishes with life and grows, not of itself but in consequence of that with which the human being endows it, as the sun acts upon a bulb, from his imagination or his soul or whatever it may be that connects a man with the great harmony of things—with the universal life. Nothing, truly, can be detached from the mighty scheme without losing immediately its real being.

Miss Paul accepted what she perceived of the mighty scheme without questioning, and was as much inclined to deny the reality of her dreams and of her less shadowy ideas, as to deny the present reality of mud upon her boots and the eventual necessity of cleaning the boots herself. For though the air was sweet with the magic of spring's arrival, the pavements were thickly coated with spring's stickiest mud.

She arrived at Nunton Terrace, and as she climbed the steep wooden stairs she uttered the customary cry of warning, like a sea-gull visiting a friend's nest in a strange cliff, or

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an ancient viking approaching the shore of a neighbour's fiord. The door this time did not open until her hand was upon the handle.

"I've just come to ask how your wife is," she said to Mr. Martin.

"Step in, Miss Paul," he said, "please. Ain't no rest for the wicked, Sophie, not 'alf."

"Must 'ave 'is joke," said Mrs. Martin. "That kind to send them things. I never thought o' such a thing, knowin' things ain't any too easy for yerself."

"You look much better, I think," said Miss Paul.

"Ah, I'm still pretty middlin', and I do fair 'ate lyin' here."

"Some folks 'ud be glad to 'ave the chance of lyin' all comfortable on their backs," said Mr. Martin, "havin' everythin' done for 'em and havin' a proper good rest."

"Um, that's like me, ain't it?" answered Mrs. Martin, "and Miss Paul 'ere to see the room and all in sech a state."

"'Aven't I done me best, eh? No pleasin' yer, there ain't."

"Yer best. Very good for a man. I'm not blamin' you, George; but things do get without me—well—not as I likes 'em, nor you, nor any one else fer that matter."

"I think it's a charming room, so home-like," said Miss Paul.

"Wherever it is, 'owever small, where one lives and 'as things, there's no place like it —like 'ome; that's a true song and a pretty one, and it always do bring the tears to me eyes to 'ear it sung. 'E's a wonnerful one to like 'is 'ome, is Mr. Martin."

"No wonder," said Miss Paul, and smiled to Grannie, who came in. Evidently the old woman had something on her mind. She looked round the room and blinked her little eyes uneasily.

"'Ullo, Grannie," said Mr. Martin, making his slow way into the other room, "done yer errans?"

"Oh yes," said Grannie, timidly; and as soon as his back disappeared into the other room, she leant forward over the foot of the bed and said, in a hurried whisper, "Young

George houtside in the street says, 'ave yer got some bread or threppence for a loaf."

"'Ush," said Mrs. Martin, "yer old silly; 'is ears . . . I told yer so," she added wearily, as Mr. Martin called out—

"What's that? Young George again? 'Aven't I told yer scores o' times I won't give 'im a 'alfpenny nor a——"

"Orl right, orl right," said Mrs. Martin (the old woman silently disappeared). "You're master 'ere, we all knows, but yer needn't go showin' yer bad 'eart before the lady—raising yer voice and shoutin'. 'E and 'is eldest 'avn't ever 'it it orf nice," she added in explanation.

"How good of you to get me a chair!" said Miss Paul to him; he was standing in the doorway holding a wooden chair in his hand. "But I won't sit down, thank you. I only looked in just to make my mind easy that your wife was no worse."

"I'll be up an' about by the end of the week for sure," said Mrs. Martin.

A sudden impulse compelled Miss Paul, as she leaned over Mrs. Martin, to say—

"Dr. Paveley asked me to marry him." It changed a distressing subject.

"Lor love me!" cried Mrs. Martin. "Think of that, now. Didn't I just know which way the wind was blowin'! 'Ear that, Mr. Martin? What did I tell yer?"

Mr. Martin grinned, and shifting the weight from his lame to his sound leg, suggested hoarsely—

"'Avin' 'im, may I ask?"

"'Are yer?" asked Mrs. Martin, with breathless interest.

"No," said Miss Paul.

"Well, maybe you're right. Less, perhaps, to put up with," said Mrs. Martin.

"Sets a vally on yer, too." Mr. Martin made his cryptic remark without noticing his wife's reproach to the stout race of husbands. His motive may have arisen from use or tact or mere dull-headedness, or from the call of his own idea for utterance. Mrs. Martin continued—

"Single blessidness, they do say."

Mr. Martin looked from one woman to

the other with a man's profound knowledge, and said with unfathomable depth of meaning in his voice—

"Ah! yes, so they do say."

"Though as 'usbands go, George, I will say you ain't a bad 'un."

"Oh, I ain't, ain't I?" he said with such a bland smile that Mrs. Martin was constrained to add with marked emphasis—

"Though you has yer faults and plenty of 'em."

"We all have, I expect, plenty of faults," suggested Miss Paul.

"And it's not for want of 'earing 'em jawered about that they're there." Mr. Martin put his face far forward to send his words properly home, and then brought his head impressively back to its normal position on his shoulders.

"I always speaks out what's in me mind. Better'n storin' of it up like, till you say things you may be sorry for."

"Much better," said Miss Paul, cheerfully. "Good-bye."

"It's done me good to see yer," said Mrs. Martin. "I do 'ate lyin' 'ere with Mr. Martin too without a job. Though if he were at work I don't know whatever I should do. 'E's wonnerful 'andy in the 'ouse fer a man."

"Kiss little Aggie for me," said Miss Paul, at the door.

"She didn't 'alf talk about yer after you'd gorn, did she, Sophie?" said Mr. Martin, proudly.

"Good-bye," said Miss Paul again; and this time she went.

Living so long, as she had lived, alone, she really met people now for the first time, not as her brother's sister and housekeeper, but as herself. The experience would have been interesting even if Chance (or one of her attendant imps) had not played the tricks she had played, and after giving her years of happy solitude, abruptly forced such diverse persons on her as Dr. Paveley and the Martins and the odd gentleman in the grey suit, who, she had not forgotten, was going to call for her at midday.

Miss Paul approached the Martins with no preconceived theories about the poor ; she was not on the look-out for examples of depravity or misery or preternatural goodness. Nor could she, in her sorrow for the eldest son's want of bread, forget the magic of spring's arrival ; her joy in the warmth and gladness of the air was not at odds with her horror of his hunger and his father's unkindness. For Mrs. Martin she cared, and her heart easily accepted the man her husband, and welcomed the gnome-like little boy and the shy little girl, the children she had seen. Her attitude was the same to them as to Dr. Paveley or any one else who was brought into her life. No standard by which she measured the behaviour of others was among her belongings. Too great an effort was required to subdue her own shyness before what she unconsciously regarded as the mystery of another human being to leave time for criticism of that being's conduct towards herself. Valiantly the gentle lady tried to understand and feel with others. Her nature, with its child's capacity for taking joy

in things, prompted her love; and now she was beginning to learn that her love, nurtured on animate beauty, was wanted. The momentous discovery, with all its latent responsibilities, was coming upon her imperceptibly, like dawn. Miss Paul, had she lived in a mediæval manuscript, would have been labelled a mystic by the curious. She was a natural mystic; most children, indeed, are. The textbooks she read on light, on heat, on sound, on human personality, on psychology, did not dissipate her wonder at these miraculous manifestations of vitality, but increased it sevenfold by informing her intelligibly of the intricate mass of things perpetually in movement, perpetually happening on every side. Astronomy baffled her. The stars remained little gods of the sky, of whom the moon was empress, and whose great region above the earth was ordered, and whose movements were mastered by the human brain. She saw the scientist working and working to discover new facts in the tremendous material of the natural world, and working to verify his discoveries on and on

through the generations; she saw the poet understanding those facts, and by the force of his imagination realising their place and their proportion in what was already discovered. She saw the consciousness of humanity developing; the scope of life widening and growing towards knowledge and beauty. Her vision of things was clear and unquestioning; her vitality was exuberant; and her power, for all her unassuming gentleness, was immense. Power of that kind is not always immediately apparent, like physical bulk or Nelson's statue in Trafalgar Square. Only remarkable circumstances make it universally recognised. Such power usually remains hidden, for gentleness is its most constant attribute. A well-eyed person would recognise it in Miss Paul by the way she triumphed over the bad monsters of life—fear, depression, selfishness—which would have caught and strangled long ago a less gallant adventurer into the solitudes.

Mr. Paul Haskins had felt her power with all his instinct—man's surest guide. But however final his boy's excuse—"I simply had to"

—for addressing the unknown lady had seemed at the actual moment, reason had raised her clear voice in the meantime with no faltering accent to declare that he was again a thorough-going, right-down fool. Perhaps, he was content with a sad smile to answer, perhaps; and as the clock of Marylebone Road church finished striking the hour of twelve, he stepped out of his six-cylinder Napier and pressed the bell.

He shook hands with Miss Paul without a word of welcome. She looked at the car in astonishment.

"There are pictures at Windsor," he almost mournfully remarked.

"In—in that motor?" she gasped.

"Yes," he said.

"I—I'll fetch a scarf. To tie round my head."

Miss Paul turned and ran along the passage and up the stairs. Her one sensation was of delight at the prospect of a drive, like a little boy unexpectedly asked if he would like a ride on a pony. She came hurrying back, her

eyes alive with happiness, and climbed, dumb with suppressed excitement, into the front seat. The chauffeur wrapped an enormous fur rug round her, and the car seemed bigger than ever when she was sitting in it, and grew bigger still when it began to move slowly round the crescent and slowly into the Marylebone Road. Miss Paul was far too excited to notice her companion's silence or his scrutiny of her person.

"I must call for my sister's fur coat," he at last said, "if you will allow me."

"However shall we get out of all this to Windsor?" she inconsequently answered, as they made their way through the traffic.

"We'll make a détour to get a better run," he replied.

She looked at him, and marvelled at his apparent lack of consciousness of the power he was controlling. He leaned a little back, almost lolling, as she thought, in his seat.

Opposite a great shop, which bore on its front the horrible legend "Motorities," he brought the car to a standstill, and, with

another apology for leaving her, entered. The gentle throbbing of the machine played on her excitement, and she could not have told at all how long she sat till Mr. Haskins reappeared carrying over his arm a fur coat, which he handed to the chauffeur to put in the tonneau.

"I'm afraid you must be tired of waiting," he said, as he took his seat by her. "These shopmen never seem to know their stock," he turned quickly round to observe whether she had detected his error, and seeing that she had detected nothing, with a laugh he corrected himself—"where, I mean, their orders are to be found. Mismanagement. Rife in the old country, even with a new commodity."

His interest in the steering-wheel, which had occupied him during these remarks, suddenly ceased. His tentative tone changed. As though a happy idea had newly come to him, he said—

"In the wind you may feel the cold. Why not wear the coat? Would you mind?"

He immediately got out of the car; the chauffeur handed him out the coat.

"Isn't it rather—would your sister mind?"

"Oh no," he laughed, "it's not."

He stood on the pavement, holding the coat by the shoulders.

"It would slip on nicely over," he said, dangling it.

Miss Paul got out, and put her arms into the sleeves.

"What a swell," she said, "I am!" And nestling her chin into the fur, "How soft and comfy it is!" she added, laughing.

"The collar goes up," he said. "Like this." And he put the collar up. It came above her ears.

She laughed again. "How huge it is!"

"Let me button the wrists."

She held out each arm in turn, and watched with solemnity the process of undoing and buttoning up the tabs.

"The wind won't blow up your arms," he said. "Now, then, for Windsor."

"You must be fearfully rich," she gravely said as she got into the car.

"Abominably," he answered earnestly, and

tucked the rug round her feet with a sigh.

The chauffeur leaned forward and suggested the best route for leaving London. Mr. Haskins listened, and without turning his head, nodded. They started.

Miss Paul was too excited to speak as they sped out of reach of the monster London. The newness of her experience of moving so swiftly through the great town made the great town itself appear in a new aspect. Her imagination was alive and gaping with impressions of the monstrous spectacle. What could induce human beings to pack themselves so closely to each other? The rows on rows of streets of little houses, in which people were solving in their own way the problem of life and passing on their way towards death. She saw a little old woman driving slowly in a carriage, pulled by two strong horses, driven by a big coachman, by whose side sat a tall footman; she saw on the pavement a woman waiting to cross the road, with a baby in her arms and two small children clinging to her

skirts. The sight, familiar enough, startled her, and seemed suddenly to open her eyes to all the fantastic discrepancies, to all the sad absurdities of the monstrous town, with its grim vitality and unrest. She saw two little boys laughing—laughing so that they leaned against a paling for support—and passed swiftly by without an idea of the joke.

They sped through the dreary suburbs, through the waste land that encircles the town, the monster's refuse; they passed orchards, and were at last in the quiet, open country. The hedges were clothed in young green, and the twigs shone brightly black in the sun. She caught snatches of the lark's song as he rose towards the sky, and his little pæan found an echo of joy in her heart.

The car abruptly slowed down and stopped.

"Well?" said her companion, looking at her. "Why?"

She answered his question with a look of amazement.

"How do you mean—Why?" she said.

"You cried out 'Stop,' that's all," he gravely replied.

"Did I? I didn't know. How funny It must have been that lark's song. To hear more of it. Such a few notes. Listen! We can still hear him singing. Can *you?*"

They both listened intently. The quietness, accentuated by the previous throbbing speed, and the peace of the sunshine and the soft air overwhelmed her.

"Oh!" she whispered, closing her eyes, "the spring! the spring!"

He looked at her intently. The chauffeur eyed his watch as the car moved on again, and muttered to himself—

"Three an' a quarter minutes' stoopid 'alt." And he added, as he put his hands up his sleeves, "Larks! S'truth—larks!"

They did not stop again till the car drew up before the Red Lion at Windsor.

"A wonderful drive," said Miss Paul. "I enjoyed it."

"I'm glad," said Mr. Haskins, simply. "I enjoyed it too." As an afterthought, for the

sake of approaching more nearly that elusive quantity—the truth—"In your company," he added, a little against his will.

Miss Paul directly looked into his face. "That pleases me," she said, and went on buttering her crust. For, to the landlady's disgust, they were lunching off bread and cheese. The gentleman drank only beer, the lady only milk.

"Why?" asked Mr. Haskins. "I am a stranger, you know."

"I suppose you are," Miss Paul replied; "at any rate, as long as you like to remain so. But you aren't quite as much as you lately were."

"I sometimes feel a stranger to myself," he said.

Miss Paul thoughtfully cut as thin a slice from her piece of cheese as the whippy knife allowed, and laid it on the bread.

"I often feel," she said, "friends with all the world."

"Now?"

"Of course now—after that ride."

"Am I included, then?"

"Included?—no. Through you, don't you see, quite specially as the reason of it all, out to all the others?"

"The others?"

"Why, to all living things—to life."

She made a quick little gesture, comprehensive of everything, and began to cut more shavings from her cheese. He suddenly tipped back his chair, and, as on their first strange encounter at the entrance of the crescent, colour came into his thin cheeks just under their high bones as he tossed out the words—

"Oh! you apostle of joy." Then he leaned forward and said very seriously, "So you like the taste of the knife."

Miss Paul was amused at his sudden change of manner, but bewildered in her search after some symbolic meaning to his last remark.

"I don't follow you," she said, and her voice showed her perplexity.

"Little lumps are better than those shavings," he explained. "Of cheese, I mean."

She laughed aloud. "And apostle," she said. "How you jump!"

"Yes—of joy. Joy you've simply preached through all the morning with every breath you've taken. Joy comes from you as fragrance comes from a rose. That's what makes your delicious sermon so utterly, so completely convincing."

"I've never ridden in a motor-car before, you see," she seriously said; and it was his turn to laugh.

"You're delightful! oh, delightful!" he exclaimed.

"And yet, you know, I am a stranger." She threw back to him his gloomy definition.

"Fate, the finest of all hosts, introduced me to you—took me by the shoulders and pushed me forward towards you. It was ordained. At our meeting the gods themselves presided," he cried with solemn enthusiasm.

"Loki, certainly, must have."

"Who is Loki?"

"I've often wondered. A very special and

grotesque little deity, peculiarly mine. You must one day come and see him. He has always, I think, quietly looked after me. He said he would, so he certainly ought." She spoke gaily, but the spirit of reverence outgrew her gaiety as she added, "What might not happen in this wonderful, mysterious life of ours? Think of the dawn and the sunset, the enormous change from night to day; the whole movement of life now in the spring, when green life comes from the great silent trees, when the little flowers appear and the birds sing, and there is warmth and happiness in the air. I can't get used to it all, the surprising wonder of it all. This beautiful world! Why should I not believe that some kind of life exists in that carved chair-back? Is it more magical than the continual daily happenings that are hardly recognised because they are so usual? I can get used to nothing. The sea and the tides and the moon and the wind and the rain and the sunshine and the stars and the earth, the dear old, thick old earth. Can any one get used to such gigantic happenings?"

He was silent for a little; then he said in a sad low voice—

"You make me ashamed."

But her mind was far away; she did not hear him.

"And the rivers and the clouds, this universal scheme of beauty."

"Don't, don't go up and away from me! You fade away from your eyes and look out at me from a distance. Come back. You make me ashamed. Come back," he entreated. "Though I've been dull, dull to the beauty, dull, dull, dull."

She looked at him without surprise. "Dull?" She echoed the knell, questioning.

He suddenly cried out. "Ah, you've come back to me down that long sunbeam, look, that's streaming through the dusty window. What conductors men may be of all this life and beauty! what a tremendous chance men have with all their powers and senses! I've always known it, now I feel it —everything is given to man that he may enjoy. Joy is the creative power. And

illness, evil, meanness, all spring from dulness, from stupidity, from being half-alive. Beauty is the highest form of vitality. We've solved the riddle of life." He beat the table with his fist. "Let's eat an apple."

"Yes," she said.

"Do you mean," he asked, "'yes' to the apple or to our solution?"

"Perhaps to both," she said, "certainly to this;" and she took an apple from the dish and began to cut off its peel.

"I've been spoiled," he began again from the depths into which he so rapidly sank; "all my life I've been spoiled."

"Not completely, I hope," she suggested, to lift his spirit from despondence.

"Just by the chance of meeting you, perhaps not."

"So very serious? But how—spoiled?"

"By money, spoiled. I'll tell you. It will be, so pardon me, the history of my life. But your life—what has that been?"

"Oh, my life!" She waved it away with a light little laugh. "To find anything to tell

would be the puzzle. I've just lived, you know."

"Just lived," he mused. "That's it. I expect you have—just lived."

"On and on, I mean, on and on," she added in extenuation.

"I've tried to," he smiled sadly, "on and off. That's exactly the difference between us. I've waited too long."

"Waited? for what?"

"Say for whom, and I answer—you. I'll tell you about it," he said, and immediately stopped.

"Yes, tell me." She smiled encouragement and interest. "Do tell me," she repeated.

"Where to begin, when you come to the actual point of narration, is the difficulty."

He lapsed again into musing.

"I was born on such and such a day. My parents—just to get going. It doesn't matter so very much where. Or from the day before yesterday, and you can go backwards." She made suggestions, to cover his silence.

"It's not so much," he at last ventured,

"the actual fact of my father having made a fortune and of my always having had money in superabundance, as the character I somehow had, which made my wealth a burden ; and about that character I don't want *you* to get a wrong impression. Distrustful doesn't describe it wholly. Sensitive, no. Affectionate, no. Queer, no. Half-hearted, no. I can think of no happy word from which you could jump to the truth. A sort of mingling of the lot. Yet that can give no definite idea. It lies in the result. I believe if I could make you exactly understand just how this motor drive with you has affected me, you'd understand all the funny ins and outs of this conglomeration—me. I'm something more than an ass in dittoes—a silly ass whom money has made miserable. Believe me, I am. Or at least I feel more than that when I'm with you. If I could explain why, I should incidentally explain the mystery of all human relationships."

He looked as deeply troubled as she looked deeply perplexed.

"This questioning?" She spread out her hands. "Always this questioning. I don't understand. You make up a question for life to ask, and you make up your answer to what's, after all, your own question. How can it matter? Yet I feel it does matter to you. Aren't you"—she leaned forward and touched his arm—"aren't you satisfied at having found a solution for what you call the riddle of life, without setting yourself immediately another riddle to solve about—about human relationships? Isn't it enough that I, just like you, I mean to go on with, say, for one lunch-time?"

"I'm too analytical, dear lady," he said. "Do go on."

"Go on?"

"With your theories of life, I mean."

"Oh, I've no theories. But that's what I feel—I mean—now. I've never reasoned things out. I've—well, I've no theories."

"Call them what you like," he laughed. She was silent. "You explain me so beautifully to myself. You see"—his voice grew

slow and emphatic—"you are what I want to become, that's why I love you."

"Do you?" She leaned forward and touched his arm. "Oh, I am glad!"

"Why should you be?"

"Why?" she cried. "Because I so feel you mean what you say; and love is so good and beautiful."

"You mean it may be."

"No, no, no, I don't. It is. Caring, I mean, for some one else, just is. It's not caring that's so pitiful."

"That's another tremendous theory, you know. But you use your brains to—to find joy in life, I use my brains to question life."

"Why do you?"

"It's my nature, I suppose, to be discontented. With you I somehow am not."

"You put it like that. But I've not much brains at all. It takes me all my time to see and read and understand things. Painting, music, books. I'm very slow."

"And people? Do you, may I ask, care for me?"

"Of course I do," she instantly replied.

"It's not of course; you might like motoring and put up with the motor's owner."

"Don't be"—she hesitated—"a foolish man in dittoes."

"I guess I make you tired."

"No, no, no," she insisted. "It's not as bad as that. But haven't we been sitting here a very long time? It's after half-past three."

"Would you think it a wasted day if we saw the pictures and the castle another time? I'm so out of the mood for seeing things."

"Not a bit," she answered, and began meditatively to put on her gloves. "Are you," she then said very gravely, "so terribly rich?"

"About half a crown a minute," he answered with a quaint sigh.

"Goodness me!" said Miss Paul. "What does that mean a year?"

"Between sixty and seventy thousand pounds."

"How utterly extraordinary it must be to have all that! And if it once began to be a

weight it would soon become a pretty heavy one."

"Precisely, dear lady. A pretty heavy one. Every time the clock ticks a halfpenny drops into my pocket."

He, rising, rang and gave instructions for the car to be brought round.

As he helped her on with the fur coat he said in the dry, dejected way that was most usual with him and from which his sudden keenness shot like the flare of a flame—

"You see how little it matters my getting the coat for you."

"But your sister?"

"Was a myth. I have no sister. No one nearer to me than a horrible family of second cousins, six big loud-voiced girls, who scan the papers for news of my marriage or demise."

During the drive back to London he was able to tell her more of his history, because Miss Paul was again constrained to silence by the excitement of the speed at which they went, and his pauses were not, to the discomfiture of his narrative, filled. Miss Paul

liked him to tell her about his life, though his wish for her to understand his character puzzled her. It was enough for her that she liked him. It never occurred to her to find a reason for her liking, still less to find words for that reason. He, on the contrary, continued to search for reasons and for exact words in which to express them, and each discovery and each new phrase gave him, she clearly saw, fresh delight. "You restore to me the capacity for joy which I was losing," he exclaimed, and to that he returned constantly, saying that it was the simple gist of the matter; and at each return a look almost of rapture lighted his lean face.

Miss Paul was merely conscious of giving more happiness than she had hitherto been able to give. She left it at that, and allowed this glad consciousness its full scope in heightening the pleasure of her drive. Her power of appreciation was quickened. She felt more in harmony with the beauty of the sky, as it royally welcomed the approach of night. She quietly felt the magic of spring in all her being,

as the hedges with all their dancing buds quietly felt it.

Once she looked at the man by her side, painfully groping for words in which to make his soul clear to her, and at the moment she seemed to see quite into him, as into a deep untroubled pool, in which among all the strange growths and weeds her own image was reflected.

She touched his arm and gently said, "Oh, be sure, my dear, that I do know you."

VIII

THE fire was burned out in the grate and the room was in obscurity. On the ceiling the light was reflected dimly from the lamps in the street. The little room was very still, the noise of the traffic hummed in the distance. Miss Paul heard the clock ticking in the kitchen, as she stood by the window and looked out on the great church. Its spire of stone rose into the sky with a strange light glowing on it, as though the stone had the power of keeping the sun's light round it after day had gone. She wrapped the fur cloak closely round her and sat down in a chair to recollect, as was her wont, the events of the day, which she supposed were at an end. Memory in solitude gave them its special charm, which was coloured by her presence once more among

her dear belongings. She mused to Loki, whose shape became clear in the dimness. "Is it because of you, perhaps, you wonderful old thing, that I've never set myself these dreadful questions? Have you always been a little in front of me on the path and held the brambles apart so that they did not lay prickly hold of me? But if they spring back! oh, then they come stinging against you. They have swung against the dear man in grey. He has always been a pace too far back. Lagging, perhaps, under the burden of his money. You must meet him, old Loki, you must meet——"

She started at the ringing clamour of her bell. The blotting-paper, with which its extreme resonance was dulled, must have slipped down again. "More adventures," she lightly thought, hurrying down; "my life is becoming a perfect whirl." As she passed Dr. Paveley's room a stab of remembrance made her flush. The day's excitement had sent her experience with him to what appeared a heartless distance.

To her surprise the doctor's nephew was

standing on the doorstep. He immediately whipped off his hat—a hat of tweed with round crown and limp brim. His hair thereby was ruffled, and his eyes beamed eagerness which his tongue was unable to utter.

"You have, I think, rung the wrong bell," said Miss Paul, making no attempt to hide a smile of pleasure and amusement at his appearance.

"Frightful cheek," he whispered, "but I absolutely haven't. Take me upstairs. I want to talk to you. Do take me upstairs."

"To me?" said Miss Paul, amazed and amused. "Whatever about?"

"Upstairs," he insisted. "I'll tell you upstairs." He clung to the word as though therein lay his sole hope of salvation from some secret doom. "Upstairs, now do. Take me upstairs."

"All right," said Miss Paul, "but I must first, you know, close the door."

He bundled into the hall, and in a panting whisper——

"My name's Rupert Harden. I'm old

Dr. Paveley's nephew. You remember we've shaken hands once. Shake hands again now, won't you?"

He held out his hand to her, as she passed him to lead the way upstairs. She laughed and took it. There was about the boy a jolly frankness and sincerity which pleased her. He was gay—fresh, young, and gay.

"Oh, Lord," she heard him whisper, as they walked up the stairs, "if the old lad looked out and saw me," and again with a sigh of elief, as they turned up the last little flight, "Safe, begad, safe at last, by all that's blue."

"It's rather dark and cheerless, I am afraid," said Miss Paul, "but I've been out all day. Perhaps you'd better not take your coat off. I'll soon kindle up a fire."

"Oh, let me!" he exclaimed. "I'm a dab at a fire. I say, what a topping little room, too!" He followed her into the kitchen and wrested the bundle of wood from her hands. "If I'm of some use, it'll make me feel better —less, you see, of a rascally intruder; and I can talk better fiddling with something—on my

knees too. You can look upon it as a continual attitude of supplication for forgiveness, which I can't go on asking for, though you do forgive me, don't you, for taking you on a villainous rush like this?"

By this time he was on his knees, rather neatly removing the ashes.

"The great thing," he rattled on, "at this game is not to coat the whole room with infernal white dust. A gas fire would be handy, but they're beastly things. With my back turned to you, too, because what I have to say is awfully delicate." Upright on his knees he looked at her over his right shoulder. "Most awfully delicate," he repeated, and his eye falling at that moment on the little chair he exclaimed, "My lawks! what a fellow! a regular old goblin patron saint, Miss Paul! I say, what's his name? He's the identical Golgonooza or Bowlahoola—Blakish, symbolic, devilish, queer——" He was bending over the grate, arranging the sticks. "He's all right you know, really, the old boy underneath. But we look after him, though he doesn't

realise it—mother and dad and me; and the parents being away on an Italian jaunt—the lucky beggars!—it all devolves upon me in a queer way which I can't hope for you to understand, but know you'll take for granted. The old dear is most fearfully pompous, but he can't help it; and he could no more speak for himself without being a ridiculous old pompous old fathead than he could fly. And I've ragged him about things and didn't realise how acute he'd got it till to-day at lunch, when, upon my soul, I happened on him, and found him simply off his poor old chump. He'd got into a scrape, and was muddling it somehow, without us to look after him."

"Yes, but who——" Miss Paul began; but the boy turned and swept away her interruption.

"Just let me ramble on and round, you'd really better; and gradually some kind of meaning will inkle into you. It's not a thing that can be blurted out. We're all keen that he should marry. He's a bit inclined to be selfish, you see; and we think he's growing

more so because he's growing into bachelor habits, which are the very deuce, though he's a rare old dear, really. You can take my word for it. And now he is really dead gone on a person, it does seem a frightful pity that he should be blighted, Miss Paul; don't you think so?"

"But it hasn't even inkled who he exactly is, Mr. Harden."

"Oh, I say, dash it; it's ridiculous to call me that when I'm sitting here making an ass of myself. I don't an atom mind appearing an ass, as long as I can somehow get things done I want to do. On the face of it my coming at all is idiotic. Rupie, Rupert, Pert, Juggins—anything but the prim formula, because, of course, I knew we should be pals the moment I saw you. And it's your wonderful eyes and that jolly streak of white hair that have done for the old uncle right enough. Shows his sense, really."

"You mean—oh dear, you absurd boy—you mean—however could you!"

The whole ludicrous truth burst upon Miss

Paul so suddenly that she could not speak for laughter.

"Really, you see, what I specially wanted to say, as well as that he's really an old dear, is that in about two minutes he'd do exactly whatever you wanted—he'd be like a regular trustworthy big old dog."

"But," she faltered, "I don't happen to want a regular trustworthy big old dog."

"Let that idea filter into your mind. It's not one to be sneezed at. Then if he gets as far as——"

"He has."

"As asking the immortal question, you wouldn't be so put off by his apparent pompousness, and if you're at all lonely or——"

"Your uncle has proposed, and I have refused him; and he has already retracted his proposal," said Miss Paul, as severely as she could.

"Oh, I say," he cried. "Don't rise on your tail and wave your paws at me. No one ever takes me seriously enough to be angry with me; really they don't. So he's done it, has

he, the old boy, and muddled it! It must have been killing. Poor old beggar! Blighted! Well, I was afraid your sense of humour would have been too much for him. Oh my lawks, I wish I'd been there. But for all that he'd make a jolly excellent husband, and we must find him one. Tell me where there's a match, and I'll light the fire. Oh, I've got one in my pocket." He struck a match and applied it to the paper. "You see, it's easy enough now for you to understand why I felt I must say a word for him. I have profound pity for any one who is afraid of making an ass of himself. In this universe—anyhow it seems ridiculous for men to strut about under the sun and clouds, mere atoms in trousers: that's the initial absurdity; and when a man's pompous about it, it's so utterly silly that it's simply pathetic. That's my point of view. That's why poor old uncle's got to be looked after. He couldn't really talk about anything more important than the weather without being tearfully ridiculous. I haven't thought it right out. But it is so, isn't it?"

"You bewilder me," laughed Miss Paul.

"I mean, look at myself now," he went on with extreme earnestness. "I've risked making an utter ass of myself, and made it, but you're not chiefly thinking what an egregious ass I am, are you; you're amused and liking me?"

"Yes, I am," said Miss Paul; "but every one's not like me."

"I only wish they were. Aren't you beastly lonely, tucked away up here by yourself?"

"I can't say that I have been."

"I only wanted to know, because one of my theories is that a person gets old and dry living alone; and uncle's told us how seldom any one comes to visit you. One of my worthy fellow-lodger's most amiable qualities — you know how he'd say it. And you're the least old and dry person I've ever met. That's what interested me so tremendously about you when I caught my first glimpse of you. How do you manage it? You might give a chap the recipe. You haven't"—his voice sank to tender depths of sympathy—"you haven't had some fearful great sorrow?"

"Oh no," she said, "I haven't. I'm just unsociable, I expect."

"That's not it, because you aren't. The sorrow theory would explain it. Something big and terrible to switch you clean off the common humanity—utterly to disconnect you. You might have been born like it, of course. Just a pet. Oh, that's the family name for the absolutely right sort."

In the silence which followed they became aware of soft but heavy steps ascending the stairs. They looked at each other like guilty children. The door was tapped. Rupert sprang up silently, and with an intensely whispered "My lawks!" disappeared into the kitchen before Miss Paul could collect sufficient presence of mind to stop him.

"Come in," she cried in a feeble voice.

Dr. Paveley entered and closed the door carefully behind him. Miss Paul tried to summon up confidence from the thought that it was after all her room.

"Madam," began the doctor, "my visit cannot fail to surprise you. But as the poet

says, 'Amor vincit omnia.' I do not know whether you are a Latinist sufficiently expert to recognise the pungent pun."

Miss Paul was almost certain that she heard a smothered shriek of laughter coming from the kitchen; but as Dr. Paveley's face showed not the least sign, she fancied it must have been the mistake of her imagination.

"I have come to offer my most sincere apologies for the speech which my jealousy evoked, and to plead," he went on with his customary assurance, "that the existence of that same jealousy proves the depth of—of—ah, my passion."

The door which led into the kitchen was at that moment burst open.

"It's no use. Your infernal voice carries so, and the door won't properly shut. And though it'd be too god-like to hear, I can't overhear. It's no go, old uncle mine. She's got far too keen a sense of humour."

"Sir!" gasped Dr. Paveley.

"The surprise is dreadful and mutual. You

must bear heroically up, painful as is the occasion."

"Sir!" repeated Dr. Paveley; and added with bitterness, "I was not aware that you were on visiting terms here!"

"I'm not; but I came. And oh, it's happy I shall die, twice to have heard the most revered of uncles address me as—sir!"

"Won't you both please," suggested Miss Paul, desperately, "sit down? The fire will soon burn brightly, and——"

But the doctor's wrath boiled over upon his nephew.

"To what, may I inquire, are we indebted for your impertinent intrusion?"

"Don't be silly, old uncle mine! What's that got to do with it? Didn't you hear our gracious hostess ask us to sit down? Come now, smile and sit down, and we'll have a nice friendly little party."

Rupert put firm hands on his uncle's shoulders and pressed. Dr. Paveley sat down without, to Miss Paul's astonishment, further

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protest. The nephew sat on the floor clasping his knees.

"And isn't it," he proclaimed with a large benignant smile, "a funny world we live in?"

"Have you," Dr. Paveley quite suavely asked, "known this extraordinary nephew of mine long?"

"And this extraordinary old uncle of mine, have you known him long?" the boy irrepressibly inquired.

"I feel it would be more satisfactory if I were to explain my presence," said Dr. Paveley; and, ignoring his nephew's remark that that was more than he could do of his, proceeded, "I have offered this lady my hand in marriage, and she has declined my offer."

A distressing silence, as might be expected, followed this announcement. Then Rupert cheerfully interposed—

"Well, that's on the carpet all right. It's your turn now, Miss Paul, to make a remark. The great art of conversation is——"

"Rupert," interrupted Dr. Paveley, "your flippancy is both obnoxious and inconsiderate."

"It's not my fault, surely, if you will thump out great personal solecisms. Hang it! Do you expect me solemnly to congratulate Miss Paul and sympathise with you, or what? Think of it from our point of view."

"You certainly ought to consider your uncle's feelings, and not treat a serious matter as a jest," said Miss Paul, firmly.

"Oh, not as a jest, really! Don't for a moment think it, I implore. After all I've said, too. That from you."

"Am I to understand," said Dr. Paveley, "that you have been discussing my affairs with this lady?" He looked from one to the other.

"I merely told her what a good old boy you were really, in spite of your pompous manner," declared Rupert.

"He means he was good enough to approve of me as an aunt," hastily added Miss Paul; but Rupert continued, unabashed and very seriously—

"My theory is that all pompous persons

must have some kind of a nurse to look after them. I was too late. You'd already muddled it."

Dr. Paveley drew himself up, breathing heavily with anger and amazement.

"A nurse! You! I am to understand that you have seen fit graciously to constitute yourself in the, ah!—in the capacity of—of my nurse?"

"Oh, don't make such a fuss about it! Yes, precisely. And I'm most awfully sorry I was too late."

"I am able, I think," said his uncle, with bitter emphasis, "to dispense with your sorrow as well as with your assistance. This, I am bound to say, is the most astounding example of impertinence that it has ever been my lot to meet with. You deserve to be caned, sir, you deserve to be caned."

"Of course it's been a failure, and you ought never to have known. If it'd ease your feelings to have six or so smacks at me with a cane, you're at liberty to have 'em, only I must have warning—to prepare."

"Please, Dr. Paveley," said Miss Paul, "you must forgive us both."

"Look here, old uncle mine, I consider mine a jolly sporting offer. I've hurt your pride. You can't hurt mine, because I've got none. The only thing about me you could hurt I'll turn gladly up for execution; or are the wounds to pride too desperate for any remedy?"

"You deserve a sound thrashing, sir, a sound thrashing."

"Don't keep on about it. You know I'm fearfully sorry you've been blighted, because we all think marriage would simply be the making of you. Be as sick as you like," he earnestly proceeded, "with me, but don't be put off by one rebuff, however hard it's hit you. Believe me, it's not with a man like you the particular person that at all matters, it's the idea of the thing—of marriage—that's laid hold of you, and a jolly good idea it is."

"I am flattered," said Dr. Paveley, with biting suavity, "by your interest in my welfare; and I am glad to observe with what

seriousness you treat your self-imposed position of—shall I say—mentor."

"That's stupid, and simply unworthy of you, like the phrase 'imposed position.' Oh, uncle mine, don't be all wrapped up in your own dignity and pompousness. What's it matter that you're a few years older than me, when you think of the thousands of years men have been living? Why, if you'd drop all that husk and be yourself with me, you'd be able to learn almost as much from me as I could learn from you. Instead of that you're just silly and sarcastic. Any ass can be sarcastic. Only a man can be real and sincere. Can't you see I am sincere, and frightfully in earnest about your future? You can't afford to make mistakes. All you people of middle age lay your heads together and worry about *our* futures—about us young 'uns—when it doesn't matter a toss if we make fifty mistakes; it's you, all set in your grooves—and forgetting about the real business of life—that should come to us for help—to seek our advice—and we'd put you up to a thing or two—my hat, we would!"

"The present generation," said Dr. Paveley to Miss Paul, and the bite of his suavity had lost its edge, "is beyond me."

"Of course it is," cried Rupert, with unwavering enthusiasm, "if you make no effort to understand it. Like everything else worth understanding, it requires an effort."

"In all tender delicacy, I should like to submit a wistful doubt as to whether its worth is quite in proportion to your high estimate."

"There you are. At it again, with your pompous gibes. Hopeless. Come on; we're boring Miss Paul. We'll adjourn to your room."

Jumping up, Rupert seized his uncle's arm, and leaving him hardly time for the hastiest of farewells, impetuously dragged him from the room. He, however, rushed upstairs again to thrust his head in at the door, and say to Miss Paul—

"I say, you will let me come and see you again, won't you?"

"Yes, do," she replied, laughing.

IX

THE dreams of the gentle lady were that night vivid and fantastic. She awoke, however, only with the hazy certainty that Mr. Haskins had presented her with a complete outfit of fur —as soft and well fitting as the coat of a kitten —and had driven her in his motor over vast tracts of ice and snow in search of the North Pole ; and that Rupert had converted his uncle to his exquisite views on the necessity of the middle-aged learning from youth before it was too late. She lay a long time brooding over them, and came to the conclusion that the actual facts were far more amazing in themselves than any dream could make them. The cold reality of events she always found to be most surprising.

Nothing, as far as she knew, would happen

that day, she was glad to think, until her friend in grey came at four to take tea with her. The wind was cold, but the sun was shining brightly, and about eleven she went out into Regent's Park to see how the daffodils were getting on. The winter had been long lived and boisterous. The wall-flowers had suffered, and the bravery of the snowdrops had been more valiant even than usual. The bulbs were late; but among the short clumps of daffodil leaves she saw many a light green bud, and in sheltered corners a few already gay in yellow beauty. These first-comers she welcomed, and thought with joy of the high knoll in Kew Gardens, which she would now in a few weeks see occupied by a golden nodding army of them. Pets, she thought—and laughed to herself to think of the absurd boy's family name for the absolutely right sort—pre-eminently pets, and spying at that moment a single daffodil quite full-blown waving gently from side to side in a very tremor of joy, she said to herself, "And there is *the* pre-eminent heavenly pet."

When Miss Paul returned home, she found

on the hall table, on which her letters and parcels (extremely rare arrivals) were put by the landladies, a big wooden box. She moved the tissue paper from the top, and saw to her wonder and delight bunches and bunches of spring flowers—violets, daffodils, freesia, wall-flowers, tulips in profusion ; and roses and lilies. On them lay a little scrap of paper, on which was written in blue pencil, "To remind you I'm coming to tea.—P. H." Pre-eminent, heavenly, she decided no other words could have those bright particular initials as she carried the box in both hands slowly up to her rooms. Everything that could hold water was pressed into service for the flowers. Never in her life before had she had half so many flowers. Her room blazed with them. They looked at her from every corner, from every place on which a jar or a dish or a pot could stand. She felt in an enchanted garden, herself enchanted by the colour and by the fragrance. She went from one to the other and examined each minutely, then she stepped into the middle of the room and surveyed them all, turning slowly round

and round. She touched the tulips with her smooth white fingers, and the roses with her lips ; she leaned over the violets and the wall-flowers and took deep breaths of their sweet life. Her eyes shone with joy. She became impatient for her grey friend to come ; she wanted to thank him : she wanted some one with whom to share her joy.

The flowers moved her by the silent, motionless ecstasy of life, which made their perfect beauty ; and then before the beauty she bowed her head in awe, as a worshipper in the presence of the Godhead.

Reverence and joy brought delicate peace, which surrounded her like the perfume of the flowers themselves. The happiness of that afternoon was already fixed in her mind, and always would the scent of freesia recall it to her mental sight, for among the smells of the roses and violets and lilies and wall-flowers the smell of the freesia penetrated, as a melody stands out from its accompaniment, and gave her most pleasure.

Her friend was wearing his grey suit when

he came, and his grey mood of doubt, as though expectancy had too often led him to disappointment. The grey mood she was able to colour. Her thanks took the simple rare form of an effort to make him feel the joy which he had given her with the flowers. At first he shrugged his shoulders to her rather nervous "How dear of you to send the flowers!" his gesture implied that such a gift was customary, that he could have done no less. But she was not satisfied with that. She put her hands on his shoulders and said—

"Do you realise my joy? You must." And she gently shook him.

"Oh, I thought I'd like to be with you in your welcome of the spring, perhaps." He spoke almost with indifference.

"You fill my room with flowers and——"

"They're so entirely your due—your right—your—there's a suitability in all things. To have been the means——" He stopped and turned away. "I like your room," he went on. "The old oak is right. But that"—he pointed to the little old chair—"that—it—he—at once

seemed, if I may say so, the chief occupant. He—it—remarkable. Sheer writhen life."

"That's Loki, my ancient Loki, whom I wanted you to meet."

"I guessed as much."

"Look," she said, "this is the kitchen."

"It's all very compact," he commented.

"What's on your mind?" she cried out. "What's making you so gloomy and deliberate?"

"That you should be tucked away up here! That these attics should be all the space in this huge town that can be spared you! It's ludicrous—it's contemptible."

"But I am so very pleased with them. You're jealous of me because I'm not abominably rich too. You're like a man I once saw in the underground with a very bad cold, who glared at every one that wasn't snuffling like himself. You haven't surely come here to set me at odds with my little surroundings?"

"Ah!" he sighed. "If I only could!"

"How disgraceful of you to say that."

"If you'd only take things from me!" he exclaimed.

"Haven't I?" she cried. "Haven't I quite outrageously done so already? Come, you gloomy man, you must have some tea. Sit down here, please"—she moved a chair a little forward—"while I get it."

"Mayn't I, though, help you?"

"No," she said, "you may not," and went into the kitchen, immediately returning with a tray, which she put on the table, and a kettle, which she put on the fire.

"I do hope you'll like the cake," she said, so solemnly that he was constrained to give his sudden laugh.

"Forgive my smiling," he said, "over a matter of such grave importance as the cake."

She frowned at him. "Since there's no choice, it is important. I should hate you only to have bread and butter at our first tea-party in my room."

"The way you said it," he expostulated, not quite sure if she were really displeased or not—"the solemnity. Not your hospitality,

which would be beautiful if you offered me a stale crust without butter."

"Do you take sugar and milk?" she severely asked.

"You mustn't think me aggravating, but——" She held up the milk-jug. "I beg your pardon. Yes, please. Sugar and milk—one lump."

"Why should I think you aggravating?" she inquired.

"I'm a little heavy and difficult, because I can't chat about things which don't comparatively matter, when I've an enormous something on my mind. Do you mind my plunging at once at it?"

"What may the enormous something be? The confession of a felony?"

"No; it's worse than that. It's simply that I want you to live with me always. Of course it's preposterous to stop a woman in the street, as I have practically stopped you, and propose marriage off-hand as I do to you; but really, I don't know that it is so. There are things to be said for it. I should

so much like you to hear me say them, if you would allow me."

"Funny to want to give reasons"—she put an odd little emphasis, as it were of distaste, on the last word—"for such—such——"

But her sentence remained incomplete. The door was irresolutely tapped while she hesitated.

"Come in," said Miss Paul, standing up. The door opened. "Mrs. Martin!" she exclaimed. "How could you have got up so soon?"

Mrs. Martin said in a whisper, "Comp'ny!"

Miss Paul stepped forward, and taking hold of the woman's arm, said—

"Come in, at once, and sit down."

"You will excuse me, miss—Good afternoon to you, sir—but I couldn't go on lyin' there. I 'ad just to come out like in the sunshine and see if there was any little thing as I c'ud do for yer. You'd just let me wash up them tea-things, wouldn't yer, after you're finished? and I'll sit in the kitchen."

"You must have a cup of tea."

"Reelly, I can't say as I fancy anythin'. Don't let me, now, jus' give yer trouble. Not kind. That ain't."

Miss Paul stood thinking. "I know," she said, and went into the kitchen.

The two sat in silence. Mr. Haskins scrutinised Mrs. Martin.

"A banana," said Miss Paul, returning, "and some warm milk. Now do—to please me."

"I do fancy nothin'. And all this trouble. Too bad," said Mrs. Martin.

Her voice expressed discontent, which her face belied, because her face, as Mr. Haskins noticed, showed how keenly sensitive she was to Miss Paul's kindness. There is, however, no equivalent in these matters to the rainbow, which appears when the sun shines during rain, so that any one might be pardoned, if not pitied, who observed the crossness and did not observe the beauty; for when a kindness passes between two people, there beauty is.

"You ain't 'alf got some blooms," said

Mrs. Martin. "My! the room fair smells of 'em." And she bit a piece off the banana and deliberately ate it.

"You must take a bunch with you to cheer you up," said Miss Paul. "This is the woman who works for me. She's been ill and ought not really to be out now. Ought you, Mrs. Martin?"

"There's things one can bear, and things one can't, which lyin' there was one of 'em."

To the latter order Mr. Haskins was of opinion that her slowness in eating the banana indubitably belonged.

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Martin," he said.

"Funny to want reasons—I mean for such a heavenly plan," said Miss Paul quickly, leaning forward to rest her hand upon his knee for a moment. "Don't you think reasons foolish, Mrs. Martin?"

"Reasons?" meditated Mrs. Martin. "My 'usband likes 'em, when a thing's not quite as he fancies it."

Miss Paul, very much to the admirable

woman's surprise, suddenly put her arms round her neck and kissed her cheek.

"Now you must go quietly home. There's nothing at all that I can't easily do for myself." She turned to Mr. Haskins and said, "Be a dear and put Mrs. Martin into a four-wheeler. There's a whistle on the hall table."

"Oh, the idee-a!" cried Mrs. Martin. "Did you ever, now?"

But Paul Haskins was already out of the room. Immediate action was some relief to the suppressed joy which set his face and lighted his eyes.

"So I'm to go 'ome in me carriage! I 'ope I haven't troubled yer, but I never thought as you'd be 'avin' comp'ny, some'ow."

"I'm glad you came," said Miss Paul. "We mustn't keep the cab waiting."

"You don't 'alf think of others!" said Mrs. Martin, wrapping her bright purple shawl closely round her shoulders.

"Mind you tell the cabman the address."

"'Ave no fear. Good day to you, miss, and thank you."

"Good day. Take care of yourself," said Miss Paul, gaily.

She stood with her hands clasped together behind her back waiting for her grey friend to come to her. Very gently her slender body, sheathed in a green close-fitting cloth dress, the colour of a young daffodil leaf, swayed from side to side. From a white fichu her neck rose in a beautiful line to her chin, which was tilted a little back. Her head, in its barely perceptible movement, seemed to be gladly and lightly poised. The streak of white hair waved up, like a song, from her forehead; her eye-lids were half closed in the gentlest caress on her eyes. So she stood, the living form of joy, and waited for her grey friend to come.

And so she stood when he came. Only the gentle swaying of her slender body ceased, as though his presence crystallised her joy into stillness. He shut the door with a sigh of happiness. He could not speak. For a little while he looked at her. Then he came slowly forward to her and gently kissed the

streak of white hair that curved up from her forehead.

"Oh, my dear, dear one," he whispered; and again they were silent.

She put one hand on his neck, and with the other she smoothed his forehead and touched his eyes.

"All over the world to this little room and you," he said; and then a little later, "To have waited so long. It is no wonder, is it, that we so quickly recognised each other? Our need of each other. And oh, my dear, I have wanted you. I was tired of waiting for you. And you? Tell me."

She thought deeply, and then in a very low and very distinct voice said—

"I'm only so glad you've come. I'm only so glad I can love you, and be loved by you."

Suddenly he put his hands in front of his face, and cried out—

"I'm full of fear."

"Ah, no," she soothed him. "No—not fear."

"These forces—these blind powers—that have at last so fantastically allowed us to meet, may force us cruelly apart." His face was drawn with pain into deep lines. "We live from—moment—to—moment—on sufferance —wretchedly."

All the strength of her great gentleness came out, as she leaned closer to him and, moving her delicate finger along the lines of pain, said with hesitation—

"Isn't that, dear, exactly what lends . . . what may make each . . . each moment vital and . . . and beautiful?"

He looked into her eyes, and she smiled at him. In that minute the old fight between St. George and the dragon was fought out again, and again the evil beast was vanquished. Fear crept away, ashamed, to its lair among the skulls and bones and darkness. His face relaxed and softened.

"You," he cried out, "you—are magnificently triumphant always."

He threw his arms round her and covered her cheeks and eyes and mouth and neck

with kisses. Delight made her look like a rose in the sunshine when she put her hands to her head to straighten her hair, while she said—

"You are disgraceful. You've not paid, you know, any proper attention to my flowers. You must smell each one carefully in turn. . . . But first, sit down here."

He sat down in the low chair she meant, and she leaned over him, and holding his face between her hands she gently loved his lips with her lips. Then, still holding his face between her hands, she looked into his eyes and said—

"Now each flower in turn, first my roses, then my lilies, my wall-flowers, my tulips—all must be inspected and their sweetness appreciated."

"Sweeter than all," he entreated, "your breath on my face."

"Come," she said, moving away and holding out her hands to help him get up. She showed him all the different beauties of all the different flowers. She forced him to concentrate his

mind upon the depth of colour, the delicacy of formation, the grace of poise, the curving lines, and all the intricate traceries of loveliness. She had already during the afternoon arrived at terms of close intimacy with them.

"Each one," she assured him, "is in itself quietly perfect."

He answered, "Like you," and she chid him for irrelevance.

The inspection continued for some time, then she sat down and "Oh, I'm so happy," she said—"I'm so happy," and closed her eyes.

He too sat down and rested his hand on her hand. The night came slowly down upon them as they sat thus silently together. Neither moved. Both were content with the expression which silence and nearness gave to their spirits. The eyes of both were turned in the same direction, and happened to rest with dreamy intensity upon the grotesque face carved upon the back of the small chair. Its mistress saw that the twisted features wore a benevolent look.

At length her grey friend lifted her hand and touched each finger with his lips. Then he sprang to his feet.

"Where shall we live? Aha! we! how shall we live? What shall we do? Rome, Venice, London, Florence, Egypt, America. Name the place!"

"You take," she cried, "my breath away. Plans!"

"Yes," he cried. "Plans," and added in a low voice, "of life, together."

"There's plenty of time," she said; "these rooms, you know, are very dear to me. I can't grasp such immense possibilities, such a tremendous change, all in a moment. Suddenly to have everything within one's reach, I mean, and such power too. You must let me think. One blessing, at any rate, is that we have no one to consider but ourselves. Or must you consider the cousins?"

"No. Certainly not."

"I think, my dear," she brooded on, "one's old habits and way of living move much more slowly than the higher part of one. My heart

has longed for you ; my heart recognised and welcomed you at once. But all the other part of me—I can't be quite clear—all the part of me that has grown accustomed to a particular working order, as it were, can't suddenly be uprooted and transplanted. It's all new to me, to have to try and explain myself. It's because, dear, I am a little stupid, you know, and I've been very much alone and alone I now find, within rather narrow limits, and so many boundaries, which I thought were quite sure always to enclose me, have at your touch disappeared, and I feel as though I were dwindling, dear, dwindling before the enormous new bigness, like a mouse on the Lord Mayor's table, like Thumbelisa in the cornfield ; I feel weak and tiny, simply tiny ; and it's so funny to be talking about myself to any one, so funny . . . and so silly to want to cry. But I can't help it."

He tried to comfort her, saying how perfectly he understood.

"Don't in the least," she went on, "mind, dear. It's not that I'm unhappy."

"That's why I wished I could make you discontented with your surroundings. The very fact that you've so beautifully been able to make them a part of yourself made it unlikely that just because of me you'd change them at all."

"Just because of you! Oh, hear him, Loki, hear him! I'll light the candles," she said, rising; "it's easier than the lamp, and a nicer light, except for reading. I'm really no good for thinking further into the future than five minutes. An egg, bread and cheese, a banana. Rather too frugal a dinner? It's all I can offer. I was not prepared to dine an American plutocrat, you know, or I might have bought a Paysandu tongue."

"Don't tease me. Do let me take you out to dinner. I'll go and make arrangements."

"Arrangements?" she asked. "What arrangements?"

"Why, get the motor, a table, order dinner." He snatched out his watch. "I'll be back in an hour."

"Paul, what a goose you are! And I don't think I much like your having my name like this. I want to walk. I can't spare you for an hour just now. You must be nice to me all the way. My name is Constantia. Summon up your courage and say it. I want to hear you say it."

"Constantia," he obediently said.

"It's a tremendous name, isn't it, for me to have?"

"Oh," he cried, flinging out his arms, "I love it and you!"

"It's Miltonic," she said; "like calling an ant a parsimonious emmet. I'm going to put on my hat."

"May I smoke while you're gone?" he said.

"You've been pining all this while for a cigarette! Why didn't you remind me? Can you forgive me?"

"Don't tease me!" he cried, and kissed her. "And don't be long."

"Poor Paul!" she said with her hand on the door, "he mustn't be teased."

"No." He shook his fist. "That epithet I forbid; it's only one step from that to mere parrotdom."

She laughed, dubbing base his insinuation into her sympathy of such a pun, and went into her bedroom.

Paul Haskins lighted a cigarette. He now, a wanderer over the earth, for the first time in this little box-room, as he called it to himself, felt the sensation of homeliness, of being at peace with himself. He had drifted so long that the sensation was keen to him and inspiring. Had he been an artist or a social reformer it would have inspired him with energy to work, but being a man without either channel in which his new love of life might flow forth, he resolved rather vaguely and quite peacefully to seek for some means by which he could make the earth a little happier for his brief presence on it. The means did not trouble him. With such a companion he knew, as he had always known, the search would not long be futile.

His wish, for all its vagueness, was sincere. Indeed, this wish is a trait, common to much-maligned human nature; and its very vagueness shows it is so part of love's actual being, that it has no more need for expression than a sunbeam. Love made him feel in harmony with life; to give is the first law of all life. Selfishness is the most insidious form of death.

It pleased him as he blew lazy rings of smoke to imagine how many hundreds of years had gone to the making of his lady. He noticed the age of the oak pieces and wondered. Then his eye fell on the little miniature which stood in the full light of the candle, and he was, as a less observant person must have been, struck by the resemblance to Constantia, who at that moment entered, gaily exclaiming—

"You put me out of conceit with all my clothes which have given me such satisfaction. They're all too drab — too drab — for my present mood."

"Ha!" he said. "There's something,

then, at any rate. But who's this?" He pointed to the miniature.

"Fancy my forgetting to show you that! That dear thing is my great-great-grandmother." She stood on tiptoe for emphasis. "And this is my family oak." She pointed out the various pieces with eagerness and pride. "They're dearer to me far than these." And she held up one by one the fingers of her right hand.

"Ah!" he brooded; "that accounts for it. No wonder that you are so beautifully at home on this old earth. You have a right to be."

"I don't understand, you solemn old pet; I surely ought for just that reason, scientifically I mean, to be played out."

He laughed with pleasure at the whimsical grace of her speaking.

"Your voice is exquisite and soothing. Soft and melodious and strong. It comes from the deeps of you, and comes so clearly, so simply, so——"

She put her hand over his mouth.

"You mustn't be foolish," she said very seriously.

"Foolish!" he cried out; "it's absolutely true. I've never heard such a voice."

"'The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,'" she quoted smiling.

"The lover's view is the only view worth having. That's a truth I've just discovered, a truth that's as old as the world."

"I wonder if that's the exact age of all truth," she mused, and they passed easily to the delight of unembarrassed silence, which he at last broke by saying—

"There's something I want to put into words. This love." He hesitated. "This love that has come upon us. Don't you think that its language—the expression it is in its own heavenly way given our bodies to use—must be learned slowly, instinctively as speech is learned, in order that it may grow more delicate and more expressive—not duller and less expressive—in the course of time?"

She looked at him a little while without

speaking; then she put her arms round his neck and her cheek against his. She said—

"Sweetheart! What makes you so sensitive to what was—not troubling me—but was just the shadow of a cloud on my mind? Sweetheart, I do love you!"

X

So Constantia—to summon, as she charmingly put it, our courage up—emerged from the shelter of poverty. Paul Haskins insisted on fitting her, as he termed it, suitably out. He scoffed at what he called her prejudice about receiving money from him. What was the use of money to him, anyhow? And he summarily and immediately clinched his argument by making a will in which he left her every farthing, and instructions that the cousins were to be paid a thousand a year each for life by the solicitor on condition that they never came near Constantia. But supposing, she suggested, she thereby missed the possibility of dear friends? He vowed he would take the risk. In her presence he really seemed to look younger and younger every day, and that being the delightful case, his

impetuous making of a will tickled her with his ineradicable vein of youngness rather than troubled her with any foreboding of his death. He showed her the will exactly a week after the day on which he had first spoken to her. She had thus been swooped up by circumstance out of reach of ordinary material discomfort, and really the most immediately observable difference was the pleasure she felt in drawing on soft silk stockings and in wearing fine-spun linen. She had no desire to enter, as the phrase is, society—of any kind. To individuals she was kindly disposed, but to people in bulk she felt no attraction, and none developed. The qualities of wit and cleverness were foreign to her nature.

In the community, by the ordered arrangements and conveniences of which she was enabled to live peaceably her own life, she often blamed herself for having no interest, and hoped on those occasions that the active duties of a citizen could be carried out by more practical minds. For herself, when the gas jet was turned off, it was gone for ever ; she could not follow it

along the pipes to the meter, and along the railway lines to the mine. The cheque she cashed weekly disappeared, as a stone sinks into the sea, in the branch-office of her bank; she could not trace it through all its processes into the Bank of England. A vague debt towards the various intricate systems and all the hundreds of persons employed in their administration troubled her mind with responsibilities, but no solution offered itself to the problem of how that debt could most profitably be paid. Before such complications her brain became numbed. But as a matter of fact the problem was instinctively solved by her in the best manner possible; and any community would have been the better for her valiant, though obscure, presence in it. She fulfilled her duty in the universe, as a lily fulfils its duty, and the light of life shone through her unimpeded. So Paul answered her, to his entire satisfaction at any rate, when she raised the question to him, and he had laughed at her for being, contrary to her recent declaration, troubled by any questions at all. Her

defence that there was a larger and a smaller life he disposed of with another laugh as a quibble, delightful because her dear low voice uttered it seriously.

Those four days were as exciting to our gentle lady as are the first days of flight to a young bird. And spring was advancing over the earth like a conqueror, with the waving green of the trees as pennons, and with the sun as shining banner. Joy was the watch-word of spring's oncoming army of life, and it thrilled in her heart as clearly as in the lark's song or in the whisper of the wind among the budding twigs. Paul's assurance that she was beautiful became more and more true. Beauty had always lurked, as it were, in her face ; now under the kindly influence of love and joy it shone, as beauty should, triumphantly forth.

Mrs. Martin, who came back to work on the fourth morning, noticed the delicate development at once, and commented upon it on the first opportunity.

"I should say as somethin' uncommon pleasant 'ad 'appened to you, miss," she said,

hitching her arms upon what had once been her waist. "If I might make so bold, 'ave you changed yer mind like?"

"Changed my mind?" queried Miss Paul, puzzled.

"'Bout the gov'nor downstairs." Mrs. Martin significantly nodded her head.

"Oh!" laughed Constantia. "No—no, I haven't. But . . . I'm going to marry the gentleman you saw in my room."

"Are yer now? I never! They do say as it never rains but it pours, don't they? Well, to think of that now! You won't be wanting Mrs. Martin much longer. And fancy me not wishin' you 'appiness!" She advanced with outstretched hand. "I wish you hev'ry sort of 'appiness, most heartily I do," she said in a constrained voice, as though she were reading aloud from a book.

The woman's words moved Miss Paul for some reason very deeply. She continued to hold Mrs. Martin's hand, which became limp, as she said—

"Thank you very much indeed."

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"I never!" repeated Mrs. Martin, judicially, resuming her habitual attitude. "I never!"

"Your husband, is he still out of work? What is he when he's in work?"

"A master bricklayer my 'usband is. None better. But he finds work wonnerful 'ard to come by. They thinks twice before engagin' a man with one leg."

"One leg?"

"Didn't I tell you? The old 'uns knows, and the new 'uns is a bit too sharp to take a lame man on nowadays when an accident means such expense; he gets work tho', when he's far up on the line, 'asn't to walk far, and they don't notice nothing. Rheumatiz, too, gets him through, but not orften, they're that cunnin'."

"When did he lose his leg?"

"Twenty year ago now. I've 'ad to work somethin' crool. But work never kill'd the cat, they say, nor it 'asn't kill'd me yet. I've 'opped and dressmaked and charred and sat be'ind a bar, and washed and tied the tops on

them marm'lade jars—precious little I 'aven't turned me 'and to. Worked and 'ad babies, reg'lar, till I've fair dropped at times. Worked and 'ad babies; and I'm a qualified nurse, too. I should know, if any, seeing I've 'ad thirteen of me own. To feel the pull of their little gums."

A look illumined her face with the spirit that illumines some of the Holy Mothers' in the paintings of early Italian masters. The woman appeared to Constantia in the light of a heroine, as she stood before her with rough, undaunted face.

"How do you manage?" she faltered.

"Ha! it takes a bit of managing. It does that. But the boys 'elp. Earning good money, two of 'em. The little 'uns 'elp in the 'ouse. Though they're all wonnerful partic'lar, and its 'Oh, mum, we can't eat this,' if they think Grannie's cooked the dinner, and 'Oh, mum, our beds is all uncomferable,' if it's not me that's made 'em. Funny, ain't it? But there ain't one as I could well spare."

There was nothing that Constantia could

find to say; the woman's placid narration of courageous endurance in the battle of life silenced her completely; this undecorated, unsung heroism filled her with awe greater than any prowess on a battlefield, to which she felt ashamed now of having ever been susceptible.

"Money!" continued Mrs. Martin, with perfect unconsciousness of her listener's enthusiastic regard. "I do think money is a terrible thing; dreadfull I call it, the way one 'as to struggle for it. I don' know. Its importance! Boots and clo'se and rent and food. When one has put by a bit, it goes. Mr. Martin's set 'is 'eart on a little greengrocery shop. Can't get it started. 'E gets a bad 'eart about it. I'm sure I dunno. There don't seem much sense in things. Best not to think too much, nor yet jawer too much, when there's plenty of work for me to be at." She laughed good-humouredly, and set about her work.

Suddenly a wave of elation swept over Constantia as she became aware of the obvious fact that she was in a position to help Mrs.

Martin ; that through her the last part of this admirable woman's life could be made easier and perhaps pleasanter. Directly Paul came she put the matter with warmth before him.

"Have you," he asked, "said anything to her ? I mean, don't let her know you're rich. Don't think me suspicious and horrid," he went on to explain his lack of instant enthusiasm, which caused a shadow of doubt to cloud her face, "but people are so queer. It's the hardest thing in the world to give. People so easily lose their—I don't know—think one mean not to give more, and don't do their best : become dependant."

"I do think this is an exception."

"Let them think the money matters to you. To give without letting people lose their self-respect by receiving is really of supreme difficulty. Don't think me a cautious old penguin."

"But you'll see him, won't you ?"

"Who ?"

"Mr. Martin."

"Of course I will."

"Well, let's go now and hear his views about a shop."

"A shop! It's not the day, you know, of little shops. It's no good starting him off towards a failure. Better to leave him with his little dream. You see, if you've fought for a thing for years and then have it suddenly given you for no particular reason, it's apt to look paltry."

"What do you suggest?"

"I'll see him and talk things over with him; find out what kind of fellow he is."

Constantia called Mrs. Martin, who came in dressed in her coat and hat and bright purple shawl.

"If you see your husband when you get back, I wish you'd ask him to step round. We shall be here till one-thirty, anyhow. My friend would like to see him about work."

Mrs. Martin stood in the doorway, amazed; it was a long moment before she spoke; then she said—

"I'll send 'im up. Goo' mornin', miss. Goo' mornin', sir."

Constantia peered out of the window and saw her half-walking, half-running from the crescent into the road, in her haste to send her husband, as she put it, up.

"You won't be grey and gloomy, will you?" She took his hand and caressed it.

"Dear," he answered with a rather sad smile, "I'm not. Really, I'm not. But if you only knew the number of deserving cases that had collapsed like touched bubbles before a five-pound note. It makes one lose heart."

"I really care for this woman. She's real and honest. You'll see. I know it. Something tells me so as clearly as if old Loki shouted it into my ear." There was no hesitation in her voice.

"I'm wavering and uncertain. But you have the infallible instinct. You are a perfect touchstone, a kind of magnet—a rogue turns green before you."

"Or grey?" she hinted. "The waverer made no bee-line for me after all, did he?"

"Oh, you," he said seriously, "that's simply you. Your power. I was willy-nilly drawn to you. Like a piece of quivering wire attracted to and made firm by the magnet. I still feel uneasy before your overwhelming directness and honesty. There is that about you which continually takes my breath away. Perhaps the reason is that I'm unused to so much happiness."

"Dear," she said, smoothing her finger along the lines of pain that were still all too quick to appear, "dear, won't you just be, to please me, content to be happy?"

"Ah, my dear," he said, grasping her shoulders, "all the shifty, purposeless tangle of discontent must be withered and cleaned away before the reality in me gets its fair chance. My love for you is like a flower on a rubbish heap, and the least thing is sufficient to raise choking, horrible dust. Bear with me."

"Rubbish, rubbish, rubbish. You solemn old pet, you're wrong, wrong, wrong. There is my love for you, which your imperial gloominess must take into account. To say

nothing of my old enchanter, Loki, whom you seem most naughtily to have forgotten. And listen," she cried, "to this!" And stepping back into the middle of the room, with her head thrown back and her arms stretched gladly out, she chanted in a low, triumphant voice—

"'O Love, who to the hearts of wandering men
Art as the calm to Ocean's weary waves.'

And to this—

'Love and joy can make the foulest breast
A paradise of flowers where peace might build her nest.'

And to this—

'Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart . . .'

No, stop," she exclaimed, breathless with joy. "Listen to this—

'I cry Love! Love! Love! happy, happy Love! free as the mountain wind!'

'O thou summer's harmony,
I have lived and mourned for thee;
Each day I moan along the wood,
And night hath heard my sorrows loud.

'Dost thou truly long for me?
And am I thus dear to thee?
Sorrow now is at an end,
O my lover and my friend.'

Listen, oh listen to the mighty words of the seers among the sons of men. Listen to the great fellows for whom joy and hope and love and youth have a meaning; listen to the poets who make their way to the very heart of life and sing to the deaf world the truths which are life's beauty. Listen, listen, listen to the young gods singing!"

He was caught up in the spirit of her enthusiasm. The monotonous rumble and noise of the traffic in the street below passed by unheard. He listened to her as he might have listened to a lark's song become suddenly intelligible; he listened to her as to a voice in the air, the voice of Love, singing. And, indeed, she seemed to be speaking not only to him but to all gloomy men who walk under a dark shadow, bidding them to come out into the sunshine and laugh again and live.

"Dear, dear enchantress," he at last whispered.

In the silence which followed irregular steps were heard ascending with difficulty. Before the knock came, he said with his characteristic laugh—

"These admirable Martins, do they arrive by magic?"

"They rap, and are admitted by the landladies," she answered smiling, and "Please come in," she called out.

Mr. Martin came in with his cap in his hand and a broad, shy smile on his face, breathing heavily, and made a stiff, rather comical bow to each in turn.

"Them stairs," he said, wiping with a coloured handkerchief the beads of sweat from his forehead. "A rare job with this." He slapped his wooden leg, and sat down on the chair Constantia offered him. He expected surprise from Paul Haskins, and was not disappointed. "Truth, wooden-jointed and all. Feel it." He clasped his leg in both hands, and offered it genially for inspection.

As Paul made no movement, Constantia, much against her inclination, leaned forward and prodded it gingerly with her first finger. Disgust was, she considered, childish and unnecessary. If a man had lost a leg, the least you could do was to allow him a little scope for his very obvious pride in the possession of a wooden counterfeit. Disgust, however, she strongly felt.

"Wonnerfully 'andy thing," commented Mr. Martin; and his epithet, adding a spice of absurdity to her horror, nearly overcame Constantia. She was rescued by Paul, who said—

"I'm interested, Mr. Martin, in the culture of vegetables." He was very like Matthew Arnold at the moment, Constantia was swift on a little cough of laughter to think. "In spite of this lady's mirth," Paul went on; and Mr. Martin, the smile on whose face broadened with interest in the subject, threw him a look of supreme and complacent knowledge of all the sex's whims and infirmities, "I am interested in vegetables. I understand you are

anxious to set up in a small greengrocery store? Is that the case?"

Mr. Martin moved to the extreme edge of his chair and bent eagerly forward.

"If you'll allow me to speak," he said, "things in my own way. It's like this."

But Mr. Martin's way was, as they soon found, so diffuse that their patience was well tried. The upshot of his wandering harangue seemed simple enough. Through information, received and corroborated by him, he was of opinion that a little fortune was waiting for the man who sold enamel-ware at the markets in the outskirts of London.

"What d'yer think a man I knows took on one Saturday night at Shepherd's Bush?" he asked.

"Thirty shillings, perhaps?" suggested Paul.

Mr. Martin made a dramatic pause; then in a voice to impose awe on the most casual listener he slowly announced, "Seven pun fifteen," and he repeated, emphasising the astounding sum with four deliberate taps of

his thumb on his wooden leg, "Seven pun fifteen!" Leaning back in the chair, he with a slight effort knit his fingers together over his stomach, and waited for the significant fact to be absorbed by his hearers.

"Every night's not Saturday night, you know," Paul said.

"Right; that's true enough. But——" Mr. Martin stopped short. "But," he repeated, "some markets is on a Thursday." His point was sent mysteriously home. And from that moment he continued to send all his points one after another—home. The man's enthusiasm for the sale of household and cooking utensils of enamel-ware was unbounded, was almost fanatical. He turned the small room with its oak pieces into a thronged street and sold imaginary wares, threatening, jesting, cajoling . . . until he suddenly stopped and mopped his forehead with the coloured handkerchief. "I knows the trick," he said judicially.

Paul laughed and said, "You seem to."

Constantia sat amazed. She began to realise

how all a man's ambitions and aspirations could be centred in the sale of enamel-ware. Her immense reverence for humanity showed her a human being striving for scope to express the vigorous life that pulsed in his maimed body. And somehow the thing was raised in her mind above the ridiculous and the mean.

"What would you want to start with?" said Paul.

Mr. Martin sighed heavily—like a groan. "That's the diff'culty. Tain't no sense nor use in it 'less you start fair and square. Make a shift, and there's nothin' but trouble from the fust. Nothin' but set-backs. Messin' an' scrapin' and worry. Money, it all means money. You can't do nothin' without a little 'orse an' cart. Then there's the 'arness and the lamps and the stock. Gawd! I know where to lay me 'ands on 'em all. Cheap too. Bargains. 'Orses, now them taxis and their like are about, are simply bein' giv'd away. Giv'd away, I tell yer! And stock. Stuff at three shillin' a gross. Get a penny each for 'em. Tuppence, thrippence, fourpence a piece. Sell

'em like 'ot cakes, and turn yer money over."

"And figures?" asked Paul, curtly.

"Aye, I didn't catch."

"Figures. How much money, precisely?"

"Fifteen pun, 'orse an' cart and lamp and 'arness; ten pun stock; five pun to turn roun' with. A lot o' money! When you wants it! And only"—he for the first time spoke with bitterness—"me honest face to raise it on. And that ain't as lovely as it were. I've 'oped and 'oped till I'm bad-'earted."

"So you think you could make it pay, do you?"

"Make it pay!" His enthusiasm flamed up.

Paul noticed and immediately rose. "I'll think it over, Martin," he said. "I'm glad to have heard your ideas. There's no more to be said except"—he smiled—"good morning."

"Am I to hope——" the man faltered.

"Yes!" said Paul, "certainly hope. I'm interested in you."

Mr. Martin beamed and bowed and departed.

"You cut him rather sternly short, dear, didn't you?" said Constantia.

"He'd have talked all day. But he's perfectly genuine. With tremendous push." He spoke dreamily, like a man waking from sleep. "Like something from another world. Here, too. In this room, where we met. Which of us is nearer life? The sheer bed-rock thing—life."

She attacked his despondency. "These questions," she cried, "again! They are simply the voice of discontent." She shook him. "And here's an answer: Who perceives and feels most, lives most. Anyhow, you don't want to sell enamelled saucepans in high streets."

Her attack, however, failed. He seized her arm and said with anguish in his voice—

"If ever—if ever, instead of your joy overcoming, if my lifelessness poisoned you with its misery, I should——"

"Paul," she said, forcing him to look into

her eyes, "Paul, my dear, it never can and it never will."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know why, and I don't care why. Faith, my dear, instinctive, absolute."

She put her arms round him, and he became in her arms like a little child. Each time she cast the devils out of him, they lost their power to return. The age of such miracles has not yet passed. Incidentally, also, by use the gentle lady's power became greater; now, too, for the first time she grew conscious of her power and rejoiced in it.

They did not go that afternoon, as had been arranged, to the National Gallery. They talked. Speech is never at all times easy even to the most intimate. For that reason, like wise lovers, they seized the moment when speech was possible to them, or in the good biblical phrase, their tongues were loosened. Time passed so swiftly that Constantia, to whom the delight of expression was a new experience, could hardly believe that Rupert, when he came, had come half an hour after

the time that had been arranged, and not at least an hour in advance of it. The clocks bore him quietly out, however, and his lateness, when proved, was easily forgiven, though, as he pointed out, after suggesting the visit himself, the least he could do was to be decently punctual. Having made his apologies, Rupert subsided into a shy and embarrassed boy. His shyness may have been caused by Paul's direct question as to what he did, or by his consciousness of something in the air from which he was excluded. The fact remains that his answer, "I try and paint," remained for some time his last remark until Constantia told him her news. That acted on him more quickly than a strong tonic.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, after saying how glad he was in her happiness, "that rather adds, doesn't it, to the sad humour of the old uncle's failure? But wouldn't it perhaps have let him down more gently, forgive me, to have told him? I mean it was such a superlatively excellent reason for declining his offer. Poor old buster!"

"But then, you know," Constantia hesitated, "I wasn't. Rupert's uncle" — she turned to Paul who was looking surprised— "honoured me with a proposal a few days before—before you."

"A wise man but unfortunate, then," said Paul.

Rupert laughed heartily. "A wise man, begad, I should think he was, an absolute historian! If you only knew! Edward Paveley. Don't you know his name? Surely you must!"

"Of course I do. But I'm afraid I have not read his works."

Rupert laughed again — more heartily. "Don't," he cried, "don't! If you have any feeling for history. Even life in the time of Elizabeth becomes, in his hand, dreary and monotonous. All those tremendous fellows are brought up before him like a lot of wretched little boys to have their heads patted or smacked at the schoolmaster's desk. His is the grand style—grand as be hanged. I'm going to be married too."

"Are you? When?" Constantia eagerly asked.

"Πάντα Θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται. Which is Greek for, God knows," he replied. "The receipts," he went gaily on, "of my last financial year were sixty-three pounds, five and fourpence. Honestly, to omit the farthing I picked up on the pavement. But," and his gaiety suddenly deepened to joy, "I know she's there." He leaned forward and said slowly, as though he were confiding to them both a solemn secret, "Mary; she's like a spring morning."

"You're a dear boy," said Constantia.

"You and she would be friends," he declared simply. "There's the same quality about you. I recognised it at once. That's why I immediately loved you." He went to his overcoat and drew from the pocket with great difficulty a framed sketch. "Look," he said to Constantia; "not bad?"

She saw a delicate water colour of a girl in white lying by a rose bush. His worship of Matthew Maris was obvious; but the

thing was sincerely felt and the workmanship was good.

"Beautiful!" said Constantia.

"Oh, don't *you* say that!" he earnestly cried. "Fair 'prentice work. Gives an idea. . . . But beauty is life, the divine—the—great—end—of all work, all achievement, the touchstone, the essence—oh, the tremendous all in all. And it's a mere Christmas card compared with what I had it in my mind to do. I've done better."

Paul was looking at the little picture over Constantia's shoulder. While they were looking at it, Rupert suddenly said—

"May I call you Aunt Con?"

"Yes, do," she answered, laughing.

Paul looked up and said, "Paint Aunt Con's portrait for me, will you?"

"What! Me?"

"What are your terms? Too busy?"

"Terms!" he stammered and blushed; "Terms! Do you mean it? A regular commission—to paint *her!*"

"Isn't that your job? Will you take fifty pounds? Head and shoulders."

"You're not, are you, pulling my leg? That wouldn't be cricket."

"My dear boy, you should try and inspire your buying public with confidence; not treat an order as though it were a wonder out of heaven."

"But it is. It's the first real one I've ever had; and you know there are the established swells." He mentioned the names of many portrait painters.

"Yes, I know," said Paul, "but I choose to ask you."

Rupert, for answer, seized Paul's hand and shook it between both his own hands in silent rapture.

"I think you'll do it beautifully," said Constantia.

"And you can exhibit it when it's done," said Paul, "and call it 'An Apostle of Joy.'"

"Oh, you two!" Rupert whispered; "you two!" and then he spun round on his heels, and cried out, "I knew old Golgonooza there would bring me luck. The beginning, this

is, the beginning! Four years at the Slade, two years in Paris, looking for work for a year in London, and now, now, now, so soon the first rung—the magnificent beginning. Sing Hey for the Purple Island! Come to my studio, and see what I've done—do come."

For answer Paul leaned out of the window and peered down into the street.

"The car's there," he said. "Shall we just run down now?"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Rupert.

And Constantia giving her glad assent, they went.

XI

THE sittings immediately began. Perhaps Rupert's enthusiasm for instant action was the infectious influence which caused Paul to close with the offer of a house in Portland Place. At any rate the doubts and questions about it abruptly terminated, and he signed the lease two days after the portrait was ordered. It was certainly a good plan, because all the various business of furnishing occupied him during the mornings when Constantia was at St. John's Wood, where Rupert had his studio. The sittings were declared sacred from intrusion. In a fortnight sufficient rooms had been made habitable. So they were married very quietly one day, and went to live in what to Constantia was the vast house. Mrs. Martin's assistance was

invaluable. She came every day, and her eldest daughter, Janie, became Constantia's sewing-maid. It was on May 10th that Constantia actually moved, and found herself installed over four servants with a husband in her own house. There was a little room at the top of the house into which her oak pieces fitted, and there she ensconced herself and Loki, about whom Paul liked to tease her.

So the days passed pleasantly and swiftly by. Paul and Constantia prospered in their own way, as Mr. Martin, who had been started on his enamel-ware enterprise, prospered in his. The portrait bid fair to be a masterpiece. They were happy as children, and enjoyed themselves as fully and as deeply as two children might enjoy an afternoon building a sand castle on the beach. But Chance (not one of her attendant imps) flung down another event to challenge our gentle lady's endurance.

Exactly thirteen days after the removal—the grief of the landladies at losing their lodger

was genuine—Paul saw Constantia drive off in the car at three o'clock to St. John's Wood, with a wave of his hat, and getting into a hansom cab drove off to the Tottenham Court Road. He went to find a bureau and a hat-stand, and one or two other things. He said he would be back about a quarter-past five—just, in fact, before Constantia.

The sitting, however, was a short one—Rupert begged her not to make the mistake of judging work by time, as if he were a "wall-splasher"—and Constantia was home by a quarter to five.

It happened to be the first time that she had waited for him in the new house. The house felt larger than usual as she walked down the stairs from her bedroom to the hall to see that the flowers which the parlour-maid had bought were arranged to her own liking. The sense of space pleased her, and the lonely feeling it imparted only gave a relish to the joy of Paul's return. The long years during which she had lived alone with Loki and alone in her brother's house made

very sweet the knowledge that another person would by his mere coming bring new energy of life with him to her, that she was not dependent upon herself for this renewal of spirit.

Was he thinking of her? and what was he thinking of her? she wondered as she picked the withered primroses and withered daffodils from the jars on his study table. It was beautiful to know, as she well knew, that some one was longing to come back to her; that she mattered so very much as she knew she did matter, to one so dear to her as Paul. "From Miss Paul you've just become Mrs. Paul;" she remembered his low laughing voice, and how he had added that he'd not meddled after all quite unforgivably with her name. She twisted up the newspaper, on which the withered flowers lay, and took it to burn in the hall fire. Sadly she threw them into the flames. The quantity of flowers which she was now able to have did not lessen her care for them, or the faint grief that their beauty was short-lived. "Even we, even so;" she

gave them a gentle requiem as the fire curled round the paper, and began to change the withered flowers to ashes. Into all the rooms she went to tend the flowers, and the blue Russian kitten, which Paul had given her, followed. He varied the monotony of the walk by lurking in corners and pouncing upon her skirt, on which he slid a little way with lashing tail. "Don't be," she said to him, "a bad boy," and rolled him up a piece of paper to beguile him into a more suitable game. He was, however, only momentarily beguiled, and kept returning with fresh ardour to what he considered a far more exciting sport, until he suddenly climbed on to a chair, within reach of the hall fire's warmth, turned round once, curled himself up, and instantly went to sleep. "Is that your comment, you bad boy, on Paul's lateness?" she asked him, gently rubbing his soft furry head, as, having seen to all the flowers, she passed him on her way upstairs to her little room.

The window of the little room commanded a view of the wide, long street. To the left,

in the green distance, Regent's Park was visible. The air was very cool and sweet. The sun was beginning to set, and the sky glowed tenderly in welcome of the approaching night.

The portrait would now, Rupert had announced, be after two more sittings finished; and they were going to give in its honour a dinner-party, to which Rupert and the girl, who was like a spring morning, and a few people—chiefly young artists whom she had met at the studio—were to be invited. Rupert insisted that Loki should stand on the table as centre piece. The party reminded her of doubts as to whether Paul ought to cut himself so entirely off from all his acquaintances as he had done. "There's not one," she heard his voice declaring, "that means anything to me—anything at all. I want so much to take this opportunity of beginning again just with you." It seemed to her terrible that Paul should have been so extraordinarily alone, though her own loneliness she accepted without a thought as most natural. She

mused at the amazing change that this spring had wrought on her life, and could not help turning to give old Loki a questioning look. And yet the most amazing thing about it undoubtedly was that the change for all its swift happening was so much less radical than if it had been prophesied to her she would have imagined possible. The numerous changes from night to day, of one day from another, of the spring from the winter, of the autumn from the summer, were far greater; and in these changes she took such continual delight—with them she had always been in such close sympathy — that her own little change of circumstance seemed really by those standards, which were her standards, paltry and insignificant. Really she felt only more herself, more able to render tribute to life's beauty, more in touch with life's beauty, more conscious of the bigness of things, and in consequence more reverent. Love, after all, was not in her case so much a change as an intensification; and nothing that money could buy was of great importance to her in

comparison with what were now, and had always been, her true possessions.

So she pondered, watching out of the high window the royal approach of night. And always there shone in her mind, like the moon's reflection in a pool, the joy of the thought that she was waiting for some one who cared for her, to come. The fairy-tale improbability of their meeting seemed natural and right to her. What a place their large hall was for all the flowers to dance in! She smiled to remember that favourite story, and saw the slow minuet of the slender daffodils with the pompous tulips; the romping gallop of all the littler flowers in crowds. And always her eyes were straining to catch the earliest possible glimpse of the dear man on his way to her.

Many taxis passed the door without stopping; one slowed down and stopped next door. Once she thought she recognised his walk, but as the man drew nearer she laughed at her ridiculous mistake. To mistake even for a moment, and at a distance, a stranger

for Paul! And still she waited without fear. Every minute made his coming more certain. It would be delightful to see him hurrying to her without being seen by him. A clock in the distance struck six. A quarter-past five Paul had given for the probable time of his return. He had thought of a present to surprise her. That, certainly, that was delaying him; must be the reason of his lateness. The glow in the sky deepened. Again she heard his low laughing voice say, like a whisper of the wind in her ear, "From Miss Paul you've just become Mrs. Paul." Intimacy with him was delicate and dear, tender like the deepening of colour in the sky, and the gradual blending in the evening of night with day.

From the Oxford Street end of the place she saw what she made out by straining her eyes to be two policemen wheeling an ambulance, and the sight filled her with pity for the man who was being taken away hurt or ill or drunk, and for his friends who would suddenly have the shock of bad tidings to face. It did not

occur to her that a woman might be lying in the ambulance. There was so much suffering in the world. Was Paul right in saying that indifference was a worse calamity than pain? That fear and discontent and peevishness sapped the flavour of life more cunningly than the big disasters?

They were pushing it along on the opposite side of the wide street to that on which her house stood. She saw it quite plainly now—the red-brown covering and the large wheels. She looked from it up into the sky, across which a little cloud, just touched with the rosy glow of sunset, was slowly moving. Always the silent movement of a cloud fascinated her like running water, and she did not withdraw her gaze until with a start she became aware that the two policemen were wheeling the ambulance directly across the road at right angles to her house. She held her breath in terror. Craning out in terror, she watched them carefully set the handles on the ground, look at the numbers of the houses, and come forward—out of her view. She waited. There

was no knocking on the front door. She could not move. How Paul and she would laugh over her scare — together ! Her temples throbbed, her heart beat heavily. It could not be that those men were really coming to the house that she and Paul had just taken. Her terror would show Paul how she cared. Paul hurt, when only a few hours before she had seen his eyes alive with love—when only a few hours before she had heard his laughter and felt his dear hands smoothing her forehead. Paul dead ! The thought was inconceivable, the thought was silly. She could laugh at it—laugh at it now if only this terror would loosen its grip of her heart.

Hours she seemed to have stood there waiting—listening. Then she heard a hurried rustling step. Jane stood in the door ; horror was on the girl's face.

"Oh, ma'am, the master ! they've brought him home—hurt—badly."

With no effort, Constantia moved forward, saying, "I know. I'm coming. Go and fetch your mother at once."

She walked swiftly downstairs without hurrying. They were waiting in the hall. The hall door was wide open; they had wheeled the ambulance not only to her door, but right into the hall. A man, as she descended the last flight, stepped quickly in and said to her at once—

"I'm the doctor—Dr. Simkins," and, kneeling down, began to undo the coverings.

Then Constantia saw Paul's face; it was white, and the eyes were closed. Involuntarily she moved forward and smoothed back a tuft of hair which lay on his forehead. One of the policemen said, "Knocked down and run over," and went on speaking, but Constantia did not hear what he said, or if she heard, the words had no meaning for her. She stood, looking at Paul's white face, and shuddered when Paul, without opening his eyes, groaned.

"Well, my men," said the doctor, "we'll take him upstairs. If you'll kindly point out the way," he added, indicating that Constantia should go in front of them, and seeing the group of frightened servants at the far end

of the hall, he called out, "Hot water, please, at once," to them.

He was a youngish man with a prompt, decisive manner.

"Be careful to keep him straight," he said to the men who lifted the stretcher on which Paul lay out of the ambulance.

They went up the stairs, a slow and sad procession. Constantia went first and waited at the bend of the staircase for the men who followed step by step cautiously, feeling with their heavily-booted feet for each stair. The young doctor came last, carrying his brown emergency case. The policemen looked anxious and shocked, Constantia looked dazed, the young doctor looked eager and interested.

"This room," she said, opening the door.

They carried him in and laid him on the bed.

All through the doctor's examination Constantia stood at the end of the bed, holding the brass rail. When Paul opened his eyes, she smiled at him and said, "I'm with you, dear;" and Paul answered her smile faintly, like a

gleam of sunlight seen for a moment on a river from a very great distance.

Constantia was unconscious of hope or despair. She simply knew, as she stood there, that Paul was dying. She did not think of herself without Paul, left again alone. Everything in her was turned towards the spirit that still hovered in Paul's hurt body; she wanted his spirit, before it fared forth on its long journey towards the Unknown, to be bathed for the last time in the love of her spirit. Her love she wanted to be the last thing that his spirit knew, before his spirit went away from his body and from her ken. Resentment, bitterness, misery, she fought them for his sake, as the intruders upon this last hour of their communion. All her strength was needed in this unseen conflict. She put out all her strength. At that moment the whole conflict of all the forces of life became to her mental vision concentrated in one picture which she had only seen in a photograph. She saw it now in blazing colour. The sight did not distract her, it strengthened her. She saw St.

George riding on the dragon with his lance couched, just at the moment when his lance was striking the monster full in the mouth. Goodness did not meekly pass along its way to be devoured if the monsters were hungry, but charged on evil, head erect, eyes glowing, to vanquish evil or to die.

She stood holding tightly with her hand to the bed-rail, the unflinching champion of life. Death she feared not, the body's end—the mystery as deep as birth. She was not fighting against death. She fought against the real foes of life—bitterness, indifference, fear, resentment, and all the powers of cowardice and meanness. Paul must die in no grey mood. His spirit must start gallantly forth into the Unknown, like a knight stooping his head for his lady's kiss before riding away on his quest. Her lover must feel the bright power of her love—now for the last time—most surely. Now for the last time his need for her love was greatest.

The young doctor looked at her from time to time, as he, with deft and expert tenderness,

went on with his business. At length he took Constantia away, and said in a low voice—

"I've done all I can, I'm afraid."

"I know," said Constantia, quietly and firmly. "Thank you very much indeed"—she took his hand—"for all your kindness. Please let me, if you will, have your card."

"I'll wait. Not long. It can't be. Spine broken. Leave you. To see him alone."

The doctor, in spite of his experience, was affected by Constantia's immense grief, which she so superbly controlled. He was, without knowing it, in the presence of supreme beauty. He had played the porter at so many of life's entries and departures that his reverence was a little in abeyance. Now reverence and awe overcame him. For the first time he took more than a porter's part in the great ceremony.

Constantia went back into the bedroom. She walked round the bed to the side on which Paul was lying, and leaning over him, she kissed his forehead.

His eyelids slowly unclosed. She still leaned

over him, and with her lips very near to his ear, she said in her low voice—

"Sweetheart, can you hear me?"

And Paul's breath formed the word "Yes," and the faint light passed again over his face, like the shadow of a smile.

"All that is beautiful on the earth has been made more beautiful for me because of you. You understand? More beautiful."

His hand found and touched her hand. A tempest of feeling moved through her; with a supreme effort she forced back under control her tears, and in the same low voice, without a tremor, and very lightly smoothing with her finger his hand, she said—

"Paul, shall I go away with you? Gladly, dear, gladly, I'd go with you. Shall I?"

"No," said Paul, and his voice was not mere breath; there was sound in it. "No. Live. I love you. Be my"—the sound went from his voice—"my apostle"—he made a last effort—"of joy." His head moved a little forward. She closed his eyes.

And then, like a caress on her heart, a

thought came to her in the form of a line which she had often read—

"He is a portion of the loveliness which once he made more lovely."

His body to the earth, his spirit to the source, wherever it might be, from which all life and all beauty come.

A kind of darkness closed over her. She went downstairs to the doctor, and spoke to him quite simply, and listened to what he said about arrangements quite intelligently. But something seemed to have gone from her. The doctor was frightened, and gave her a sleeping-draught, which she consented to take.

Mrs. Martin came and put Constantia to bed like a child, gave her bread and milk, and stationed herself in front of the door, though no one was likely to disturb her.

In time with the throbbing of her temples the last words of Paul beat, syllable by syllable, through our gentle lady's brain: "My—a—postle—of—joy—My—a—postle—of—joy!"

XII

THE details of the accident and the inquest were fully reported in the Sunday papers. There was a sketch of a weeping woman, which Constantia fortunately never saw. The probable number and situation of the bones broken in Paul's body were given, and differed slightly according to the reporter's ingenuity or physiological knowledge. Everything was minutely described, from the appearance of the corpse down to the feelings that were supposed to be hidden most deeply in the heart of the bereaved woman. Many ladies read the account, and commented upon it to themselves or to an intimate friend: "Only a fortnight! What luck some women have!"

Constantia was unconscious of the momentary interest of envy or sympathy which she

aroused. Indeed, she was unconscious of everything except that Paul had been taken away. The suddenness of the disaster stunned her. She moved under a great weight—in darkness. Dr. Simkins was kind and practical in his help. Paul's solicitor saw to the business of the dead body's disposal and the disposal of effects. He found no difficulty in making her understand what it was necessary for her to understand. Her mind was strangely active, but her body was very tired—more tired than she had ever thought possible for her body to be; and she felt in her soul dead, as though the virtue had passed out of her body with Paul's life. Everything seemed dully unreal and far away. Everything seemed meaningless. She saw flowers without any response to their beauty; she felt the wind on her cheek without any response to its touch; her heart gave no response to the bright warmth of the sun or the majesty of the clouded sky; she was blind to the varying pageant of the sunset, and deaf to the music of the birds in the rustling trees. Nothing

existed for her. The light was gone from her eyes. She moved in darkness, under a great weight, and she felt tired—very tired.

Often all her strength became concentrated on the effort (like a little boy being very brave) not to cry. She slept much—heavily, without dreaming—yet sleep did not rid her of the weight which accumulated from day to day. She sat for hours motionless in a chair, gazing in front of her. She never opened a book. She never spoke to Mrs. Martin, who quietly insisted on stopping in the house and waited on her always with tireless care, unless Mrs. Martin spoke to her. When the woman spoke it was usually to press her to eat, and she called Constantia "dearie," enrolling her among her numerous children; and Constantia obeyed like a child, and ate what she was bidden. Sometimes she looked up at Mrs. Martin like a tired child, and said with the pitiful shadow of a smile, "Must I?" Then tears came into Mrs. Martin's eyes, and she answered firmly, "Eh, dearie, you really must, now."

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Constantia generally sat in the little room at the top of the house, but sometimes she wandered through the house, through all the great empty rooms, without noticing the new furniture which had come and been placed at Mrs. Martin's instructions where the admirable woman thought best. The servants were frightened at her appearance, and immediately left any room when she entered. The blue Russian kitten liked her to wander, and crouched and pounced upon her dress with unabated zest. Once, however, she picked him up, and handed him to Laura, the housemaid, saying, "Please cut his claws, they're growing too long." Laura took him, and burst into tears as she carried him out of the room. There was something in the quietness of her mistress's request which overwhelmed the girl. One afternoon Constantia stopped all the clocks—their ticking hurt her.

It has been said that Constantia was aware only of her loss, which deadened her sensibilities like a blow, and crushed her like a great weight. That was so. But in her

mind was present a hope, like a glimmer of distant light, which makes the blackness of a dark night blacker.

Hope? It was something far vaguer than a hope. She did not formulate it in thought or word to herself. It took no definite shape in her bruised mind. It was a possibility—the possibility that Paul might have given her a child. It did not come to her even as definitely as that. But the possibility, till she knew, forced the weight of grief down upon her—the uncertainty prevented her from making any effort to begin once more to live.

Ten days dragged slowly by. Then she spoke with Mrs. Martin, and the distant light disappeared. Consciousness revived when this glimmer of something vaguer than a hope had faded away from her. And with the revival of consciousness she began to suffer, no longer dully but acutely. Spring now held full sway over the world, and with relentless gaiety forced life into her misery. Spring imperiously demanded a response, if not of

joy, then of sorrow. Nothing with any particle of life might remain any longer dormant. Earth's panoply of life derided her. The sunshine mocked her grief. The singing, joyous birds laughed at her loneliness. The sweet warmth of the air quickened her anguish. Every little thing that reminded her of Paul pierced into her like a white-hot steel. This agony seemed all that was left to her of Paul, and she cherished it. She cherished it, and she felt false to his love in doing so. Why had he bidden her be his apostle of joy? Why could she not tell him that he had asked what was impossible? One more hour she wanted with him; one more hour to talk with him, and be comforted by him. He had asked too much of her. She had no courage. She was little and alone and sad. "Paul," she cried out, "I'm sad, dear—too sad to do what you wish."

She began to cry. She had cried before, but without sobbing and dry-eyed. Now she sobbed like a broken-hearted child, and the tears flowed down her cheeks. She made no

effort to control herself; no more effort of any kind was possible to her. She went on crying till her body was so exhausted that she fell into a deep sleep.

And for the first time since Paul's death she dreamed, and she awoke refreshed. Her dream was singular. Generally she quietly lived in dreamland in much the same way as she lived in the more normal world. In this dream, however, she watched a woman sitting on a dark-brown tree-trunk, wrapped in a large green cloak. She was not conscious of standing or of sitting, but merely of watching, and of knowing that she was invisible. The woman's back was turned to her, and by her attitude the woman was clearly afflicted by a great sorrow. A very old man, also with his back to her, stood by the weeping woman. The old man recalled the Wanderer to her, until, by a gesture of his hand, she felt he must be Loki, grown more human than she had hitherto seen him. He was speaking. He turned. At first she only noticed that his lips were moving; but suddenly, without

any reason and yet without any surprise, she heard quite distinctly what he was saying.

"I do right to upbraid you," the old man said. "Such grief is sinful—sinful as any other denial of life. He lives in your memory. See, then, that your memory is no evil place of sores. Deny life, and you deny his love."

The old man disappeared, and the woman rising, turned, and Constantia for the first time saw that it was herself. Then the woman, this other self, spoke to her.

"Shall we together try?" she said.

And all the leaves and birds and flowers took hold of the word and passed it in a growing chorus on, until the very stars in heaven shouted "Try!"

So Constantia awoke refreshed.

This imagination which had lent poignancy to her love and to her grief at length reasserted its power for her welfare. She began to see things through its agency with a deeper view and a clearer insight. It lifted her a little above the sphere of personal loss, and showed

her how she could come more closely to what she felt to be the universal spirit of life.

So she thought as she lay dozing, and the memory of her dream dominated her mind. But the torpor of despair is not lifted by one dream, however vivid. She took no immediate step in the new direction, and the entrance became hidden by descending darkness. There was, after all, surely nothing to be done. What was the use of counteracting the order that she would see no one? No one could want her. A sense of obligation only might bring Rupert. Without knowing it she employed all the old arguments for inaction, which rise glibly to the lips of those who for any reason shirk giving. They were new to Constantia and unsatisfying, but, as always, they were unanswerable. A kind of uneasiness was in consequence added to the gentle lady's sorrow. She was, however, ready for any kindness which might come right up for her hand to do, though she could take no actual measure to meet it on its way. She did not notice, as she would have noticed before,

how troubled Mrs. Martin looked. It would have been evident to her that the woman's visits to her home were painful; that something was gravely wrong. But when Mrs. Martin said that she was unable to stop any longer, Constantia thanked her for having stayed so long, and was secretly a little aggrieved at the woman's abrupt manner of withdrawal from the original arrangement of a month's stay. So that when she chanced to overhear Mrs. Martin scornfully and tearfully remark to Laura, "Catch me addin' to 'er worries, poor dear!" it surprised and distressed her.

She immediately sent for Mrs. Martin to come to her room, and questioned her. Then she discovered that Mr. Martin's sound leg was daily developing the very symptoms which had resulted in the loss of his other leg. The knee was terribly swollen, and the pain was unbearable.

"It's a growth," she said, "and if it is a growth, there ain't nothing for it but to 'ave 'is leg off; and what a 'ealthy man like my

'usband is to do with no legs, I'm sure I dunno."

"How long has he been ill?"

"Three days after I come 'ere, it began to give 'im trouble."

"But what's he done?" exclaimed Constantia.

"Done! Well, 'e ain't been able to do much. He's afraid to go to the 'ospital. You see, they pulled 'im about for 'is other leg something shockin'. And 'e don't like to fancy it's bad enough to go through that again. Four of them student chaps 'eld him down while the doctor bored 'is knee to let the bad stuff out. And it was all for no good, cos 'is leg came off in the end. But don't you worry, miss—ma'am, I should say—what 'as to be, 'as to be, and you've enough on yer mind. But it do seem 'ard just as 'e was startin' so nice and all, and 'is 'orse there eatin' 'is 'ead off, though he thinks he knows a man as would 'ave it orf 'im. He 'as been to the 'ospital, but after three hours' wait the doctor bandaged it up so tight that 'e was

fair wild with pain in the evening and took 'em all orf again. And gettin' there's a job ; 'e's a 'eavy man is Mr. Martin, and shifting of 'im ain't easy."

Constantia, for the first time since Paul's death, asserted herself; the pang which Mrs. Martin's mistake in address sent through her heart, stimulated her to action.

"My dear," she promptly said, "you mustn't give up hope. In twenty years people have learned much about diseases. Even that growth may now be curable."

"He 'as got a wonnerful constitootion, I will say. 'E was up an' about fourteen days after 'is other leg was took orf."

Constantia did not at once answer. She was thinking what could be immediately done. After a moment she said—

"We'll soon find out what is best, and do it."

"Reelly, it do seem strange," Mrs. Martin complained, "for me to be troublin' you now, of all times, with my worries."

"It's not a trouble," said Constantia,

brooding, "it's a help, the greatest, if you understand, for me to feel I can be of some use."

"There's not many as I knows as 'ud think so," declared Mrs. Martin.

"You must believe me that I do."

Constantia began to realise the resources at her command. She telephoned to Dr. Simkins to find out if he were in and could see her. He could. She telephoned to the chauffeur to bring round the car, which she had used twice since the disaster, and drove at once to the doctor's house.

Dr. Simkins received her cordially, and she gallantly fought the pain of the memories which the sight of him recalled. She had something else to occupy her mind.

"I want your professional service, but not for myself," she began; but he interrupted her.

"I don't know if you are aware that I am what is called a Homœopath?"

"Oh!" she said; "what difference does that make?"

"None," he laughed. "But there is a prejudice against us in the faculty. I thought I ought to mention it."

She gave the particulars about Mr. Martin, and asked him if he would let her take him to Nunton Terrace in the car at once.

"Certainly, poor chap," he answered. "And we'll see if there's a bed in the hospital."

Constantia was not in a mood to waste time. She drove with him to Nunton Terrace, to the wonder and excitement of its inhabitants.

Mrs. Martin was waiting at the door of the block to receive them. She escorted Dr. Simkins to their room, while Constantia stopped in the centre of a little gazing crowd of women and children.

The doctor soon came back saying that the case was grave, and that Mr. Martin must, if possible, go into the hospital; and for the hospital they forthwith, at his suggestion, started, amid faint cheers from the children. They left Mrs. Martin almost tearful with gratitude.

At the hospital in Great Ormond Street

a bed was found to be vacant. From the hospital the doctor telephoned for the St. John's Ambulance (at mention of the word our gentle lady shuddered) to be at Nunton Terrace at 10.30 on the next morning, and despatched a telegram to inform the Martins.

This activity on another's behalf tired and refreshed Constantia. It was, as she a little sadly told Dr. Simkins on their drive back to his house in New Cavendish Street, the medicine which she needed.

He agreed with that, but he did not agree with what she called the absurdity of his accepting for his services a nominal fee. He said that it was a pleasure to be allowed to help her help the poor fellow. She said that the acceptance of his full fee need not in any way detract from that kindly expressed pleasure. "You are," he answered, "irresistible;" and again memory stabbed her heart.

She arrived at Portland Place to find Rupert coming away from the door. He swept off his tweed hat by its limp brim.

"So," he said, "you've decided to drop

me, have you?" He spoke jauntily, but deep tenderness looked out of his eyes as he took her hand in his. "I'm not easily"—he became aggressive, noticing more clearly the change which sorrow had wrought upon her face—"I can tell you, dropped. You shelter yourself behind all those servants. You've become, Aunt Con, hang it, as difficult to approach as the editor of an illustrated weekly."

"Nonsense," she said; "I'm very pleased to see you. We'll have some tea if you'd like it."

"Very much. But best of all in your own little room, if you can induce the ladies who honour you by their attendance to carry it up so high at so late an hour."

Tea was quickly brought. Constantia was genuinely pleased to see Rupert, but she was conscious of a horrible sensation that this pleasure increased Paul's distance from her. It was as though she saw the tide advancing and the sea covering the footsteps in the sand of a friend who had gone. She hardly heard

Rupert, though he did his best to claim her attention, tell his news that the old uncle had left his rooms in the crescent and taken a small house in St. John's Wood.

"Fairly near us; but that's not the reason the poor old thing gives for the upheaval. His present situation makes it harder for him to master—you know how he'd put it—painful feelings. We're sorry, because we think that taking a house without a wife will make it less likely he'll ever take a wife." He noticed grief close down upon Constantia, and went bravely prattling on. "The parents have been back from Italy now for a week. You must meet them. They've brought quite a collection of photographs with them. Simply broke, they are. It's luck having parents that are such children. Spent all their money and had to come home a week earlier than they intended in consequence." He suddenly threw himself down by her, unable to keep up any appearance any longer. "Oh, Aunt Con, dear, it's too awful, too awful for you. All the circumstances . . . Why just

to you? Why not to me? Death so looms over us all. Really the great inducement to live—each moment to live, to live. Recognition increases the power of beauty. We all so want your power. We all so want your power. It still comes from you even now, even as you sit there overclouded with sadness. I thought if I'd been—if it had happened to me—if Mary had been suddenly snatched away, I should have simply"—he got up and strode from side to side of the room—"simply given in, dwindled out. I imagined it all, I imagined it all. I felt she was dead. I'm a coward. I couldn't stand it. But you—you have courage; you—you have fineness, beauty. I saw what I ought to do: what you would have helped me to do. To have lived on more bravely, more deeply. You'd have helped me. I've pitched myself at you—from the very first. Now I couldn't let you be alone, if I'd come every day for a month and found you were out each time. We all want you. Your fineness, your delicacy, your understanding of beauty."

He stood by the window, looking out. His back was to her; his young body was tense with the strain of feeling.

"Who do you mean by *we?*" she said after a short silence.

He did not at first turn round, as he answered—

"We. Not just our little band of struggling artists. I see it all so clearly now after this has come upon us, like a frightful flash of lightning." Still he did not turn round. His voice was low and intense. "It's every one who wants to do something for its own good sake. It's every one to whom money is a means and not an end. It's every one who hates a fat peddling meal-to-meal existence."

Then he swung round upon her. "You're one of us. You live in the big world where things have meaning, where things matter; in which death and love move, and the spring and the flowers and the summer and the winter are not forgotten. You live. You're one of us. We enjoy the world. They become

craven and indifferent, mean and bitter, with their little selfish desires and their paltry, selfish ends. We live for the world. By enjoying we possess the world. We love and face old age and death without defiance. We are not tired and discontented. The whole thing's too big to mind about ourselves, except to keep our little selves in harmony; and that power we have. It is our gift of understanding, of manhood. Little selves I say. No; our god-like selves. God-like! They set up deities to worship or shake their puny fists at. They expect things of life. They look for rewards. They invent penalties. They create duties and conventions to rail against or obey. They move in fetters of habit. They creep through life in fear. Shelters, denials of life, cowardice. Sweep all that rubbish away. Let's go forward with hands outstretched towards life, and bow our heads only before Beauty, which is the final and highest expression of life. Let's be searchers for Beauty, wherever it may be found, Beauty that in life is joy and in art is life, Beauty that is eternal, and the source

from which all strength comes, and by which the spirit is for ever renewed and kept young."

He stopped. Constantia remembered her own sudden outburst to Paul, in which she had bidden him listen to the young gods singing. Were, she thought, their songs presumption? The voice of inexperience, the voice of foolishness? Or did they see and sing the brave and beautiful truth? With his last words Paul had told her to be his apostle of joy. How could joy come from such grief as was now the greatest part of her? Her mind put these questions; but she knew quite well there was no question. She knew quite well that the young gods were right. She only doubted her own courage.

"You think I'm cruel and intrusive and impertinent?" she heard his voice exclaiming. "I don't care. It doesn't seem to matter. You know I'm speaking to you for my own sake. Great God, you don't need help from me! I'm not even the nibbling mouse at the entangling net. I merely utter now

what you taught me, what you might, being stunned giddy, have for a moment forgotten, lost."

She looked at him with a smile through the tears in her eyes.

"It was a mouse, a real one, that first started me off. But you've done for me so much more. You've done for me what——"

Her voice entirely went. She was again—so swift are the visions of the imagination—holding the brass rail of the bed on which Paul lay dying; she saw again the blazing picture. And now she saw that the monster who had crept wounded to his cave among the skulls and bones and darkness had emerged with ten other monsters. The warrior spirit did not shrink from the encounter. Paul's last words no longer sounded like a menace for her weakness; they recalled one great victory, and they were now for ever the battle-cry of her strength. The boy's warning voice had roused her before the monsters wound the warrior spirit in their long coils. He had done for her what she had done for Paul.

She ceased to doubt her courage. She stood up.

"You're right," she slowly said. "The young gods sing the truth." She put her hands on his shoulders, and forced her voice to say, "In our memory he lives—the only home on earth for his love and for him now. We must keep his home fresh and bright and singing."

She took her hands from his shoulders. She went on speaking, far away from the boy and the small room, with her head tilted slightly back. She stood as she had stood when first waiting for her grey friend to come back as her lover, and swayed from side to side. Her neck rose in a beautiful line to her chin. The streak of white hair waved up like a song from her forehead.

"Love must be so much more than any mere personal satisfaction. It must go out to all that is lovely in the world. To live love must be selfless, above self. It must simply become life itself. More than the passion of a moment, more than the joy of a

moment. Love is life, and life is God. Help me, God—help me to live!"

She prayed. Her soul was open for life, for God to enter.

Rupert stood very still; then he went again to the window. His heart responded passionately to her prayer as he looked up into the mysterious depth of the blue sky, and saw the trees in the distance moving under the invisible, mysterious power of the wind.

"It's all so big," he reverently said, "so big and wonderful."

They were silent for some minutes. Then Constantia said—

"And the portrait?"

"Oh," said Rupert, "the portrait. You're right clean beyond my range. How can I ever express in paint what I now see through you? The hideous gulf, which yawns between one's power of expression and what one wants to express, widens. Every minute of wasted time rises before me and grins derision at me. One wants such Titanic strength. It's so much easier to deny than to affirm; so much easier

to destroy than to build. Joy is so terribly simple. It just is. Whereas all the reasons for misery give you something to hold on to, to understand it by. Joy just is, or just isn't. It's hit or miss."

"I don't understand," she answered, "anything about art. But it's better, surely, to fail at trying the highest than to succeed in doing what is not the highest. I mean within your ken. Please don't say things about me like that. I don't——"

"They're true," said Rupert, doggedly. "I shall."

"I want you to finish the portrait."

"All right," he said. "I will try."

"Good boy," she answered—"good, dear boy. How's Mary?"

"Broken-hearted about you."

"You musn't let her be."

"No; I'll tell her. She understands"—he looked defiantly at her—"your great beauty and strength," he said with fierce emphasis. "We're dining at Paganis. Come too."

"Dinner's ordered here. Bring her here, if it won't spoil the party."

"I'll bring her. I must go now to meet her."

"Don't let her think I'm an old sad thing."

"Aunt Con! How dare you say that!"

"I am, you know. But I'm something more as well. I think I'll come with you. I only didn't because I was afraid of cook's wrath. She can eat the dinner with the others, instead of sending it up to me. But that won't appease her."

XIII

EVERY morning, when Constantia awoke, the effort to begin again taxed all her strength. Her sleep was often fitful and uneasy. Her body became rebellious. She refused the excuse of illness, and forced herself to take fresh air. But often her strength left her; her will ceased to act. Often she decided that to go on was impossible. She would attend to the affairs she had begun, and finish them—see Martin well and his family prospering; see Rupert happy and married; and then she would buy enough laudanum at different chemists to end all the effort and pain for ever. Why not? She was not wanted.

Her choice shrank to extremes, exactly as it had, after her brother's death, shrunk. No halfway measure of indifference intervened.

Either life to the limit of her powers, or death.

One evening as she sat in her room the desire of death was strong upon her. Death beckoned her to its long, deep sleep, to its unending peace and nothingness. Death enticed her to delay no longer, but to come.

Then, as often, she looked at Loki, and spoke to him—quite gently.

"This life," she said, "impassive old Loki, is it after all worth it—this aimless pain?"

And through her mind, against her will, as though the writhen face with its fierce expression of life had forced it upon her, the answer almost sounded—

"Worth it, if you live for others—always; if for yourself—never."

She knew it well enough. But she wanted to be happy, as she had been, without all this strain and thought. These questionings, when Paul was troubled by them, she had so victoriously dispelled. Were her instinctive answers empty and false? If so, then love itself was a delusion and life itself a jest.

She felt at that moment that she was looking into the unveiled face of life; she felt like a man who meets his own ghost in the middle of a great desert. She was alone in the vast spaces, and she was frightened; but in spite of the fear and the loneliness she listened to a faint sound in the distance, that approached and became clearer, until, passing like soft, tremulous breaths of wind, it left in her mind the knowledge that there was beauty, that there was kindness. It seemed to her as though she passed through the barriers for a moment into the world beyond this world, and had come back with this knowledge, of which she now felt ashamed of having been before only dimly aware.

After that evening her power increased, and the power of the enemy lessened. Patience or resignation are words too passive to give to her state of mind, though she did not go on her way, as Rupert went on his, rejoicing. Hers was the deep joy of victory and experience, Rupert's the tempestuous joy of the morning.

Constantia could not become accustomed

to the size of the house, and the servants remained strangers, who lived their lives (in spite of the size of the house) at disconcertingly close quarters. At first the idea of moving seemed perilously near to running away. But as her confidence grew, she decided that to remain would merely be a waste of strength. Her heart turned towards the small, familiar rooms in which she had begun her lonely battle, and up and away from which she had been lifted by circumstance. Accordingly as soon as Dr. Paveley moved out, she stored the furniture which she did not want and moved in. Mrs. Martin came every morning as she had come before, but her daughter—Constantia's sewing-maid—lived at the top of the house in the little room which had been her kitchen—the scene of Faust's first adventure. It was very odd for her to be back again, and yet extremely natural.

She took up her new life in earnest. Her desire to help found ample means of expression. She was besieged by begging letters, to which she paid no attention. It was mischievous to

give without knowledge. She heeded Paul's fears.

Two schemes, as Mr. Martin progressed towards recovery, chiefly occupied Constantia's mind. The first affected Rupert's future, the second Nunton Terrace. In the little rooms she had attacked dirt and hunger almost alone. Now that her forces were increased, she desired to extend her operations against the elemental foe ; and Nunton Terrace having been by her friendship with Mrs. Martin brought within her cognisance, on Nunton Terrace she resolved to make her first onslaught. How to begin was the problem. The whole gigantic organisation of society stood in her way, and when an entrance appeared in that confronting wall, she found that the natures of the people themselves were in far greater need of reform than the circumstances under which they lived. When the idea first came to her, it came with the fairy vision of a bright, happy street, but very soon that vision faded. The process of any change is long and slow. The task, that looked at first so easy for a resolute hand, appeared

in its true and huge proportions of deliberate difficulty. A little help here, a little help there, and perhaps a few people might be lifted to brighter lives, if great care and great love were lavished. Those were, after all, bigger powers than money.

For instance, Mrs. Martin's third son, Robert, worked at a brewer's from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.; his work consisted chiefly in washing beer-bottles—"returned empties." It is true that he earned eleven shillings a week, but there was not much scope for promotion materially or spiritually in that comparatively unskilled labour. Robert had a turn for carpentry, so Constantia got him apprenticed to a carpenter. Mrs. Martin's eldest son had cleaned motors and could drive them; he was interested in the machinery and had picked up much knowledge. Constantia had him trained; herself she coached him in the streets of London until he was able eventually to pass the examination at Scotland Yard, and become the proud driver of a motor cab. So she felt her way towards a more extensive attack on the unhappiness of the Terrace.

Her other scheme, with regard to Rupert, for long baffled Constantia. Paul's sudden death made her feelings of fear for Rupert and Mary, as she confessed to herself, morbid in intensity.

It seemed absurd to her that she could not quietly give him enough money from her abundance to enable him immediately to marry, and yet she could not find words in which to make the suggestion. Rupert ardently and always asserted that his uncle was an old dear at heart ; and Constantia was so baffled by her own inability to find a way out of her difficulty, that she decided, since something must be done, to consult Dr. Paveley. He might help her. She had met Rupert's parents, and had actually visited them on purpose to ask their advice, but she could no more broach the subject to them than she could to Rupert himself. She tried to find no reason for this. As Paul would have said, she simply couldn't, and there was an end of it. To Dr. Paveley, however, she simply could.

She called at his house in St. John's Wood.

Dr. Paveley was at home. As she was shown into his study, the odd thought occurred to her mind that she had never before seen him in the midst of his belongings, and when she saw him rise to greet her, she was amused at her momentary surprise that he looked precisely as he had looked before all the big things had happened to her. He was even wearing the same dull crimson slippers.

"Madam," he rather stiffly said, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Oh, thank you!" she answered. "What a pleasant situation you have found for your house! I've taken, you perhaps know, your old rooms. Familiar places, I find, attract me."

Dr. Paveley was looking very hard at Constantia.

"I have heard," he said, "from my harum-scarum nephew strange rumours concerning you, which your costume seems both to substantiate and to refute. I observe signs of wealth, but none of—of what I may in all tender delicacy call the suits of woe."

Unaffected by the crudity of his reference, Constantia answered—

"I always wear grey now, with the light left in it if possible. But I want to speak to you about your harum-scarum nephew."

The old woman brought in tea. Two large cups were already filled; there was a lump of sugar in one saucer.

"You will pardon," said the doctor, "a confirmed bachelor's somewhat homely arrangements. Even a scholar looks a fool with a teapot in his hand. I press the bell on the rare occasions when I require a second cup. I hope you will allow me to do so on your account, should you feel it necessary. Tea is a most refreshing beverage. It is doubtless also pernicious. But since I have lived here my ancient domestic has influenced me to partake of it. I was previously content to sip a small glass of brandy and of soda."

"It is, I think, an excellent plan," said Constantia. "About your nephew—Rupert——"

"That young man is," declared Dr. Paveley, interrupting her, "if you will forgive the

expression, a spoofer. By that vulgar but expressive term I imply that his ideas are second-hand, and are wholly in opposition to his practise. He breakfasts at ten, and becomes lyrical on the beauty of work. He sleeps so much and so deeply that he will always, I much fear, remain that painful and foolish thing—an enthusiast."

Constantia was pleased to see Dr. Paveley in such an amiable humour. She laughed, and objected—

"He works though till three, and never sleeps after lunch. But it's his future——"

"His future, dear madam, is not a proper subject for a wise man's consideration."

"His career, I rather mean."

"I see no reasonable prospect of his ever having a career. An artist exists to please more serious individuals in their leisure moments by his work—painting or writing or sculpting. That is his business. If he mistakes his business, and uses his brush or his pen to lecture or instruct, or for any other purpose than to please his patron, the public,

it is right that he should be neglected. My nephew is a young man of some intelligence; but he has not sufficient intelligence to realise that he must please the patron before he can enjoy the luxury of pleasing himself."

"That's just," interposed Constantia, "what I want him to enjoy. It's the only way of doing anything. I mean to please one's self. Couldn't we now put him in such a position that he might meet his patron on level terms? We're both very fond of him. Now, why shouldn't we establish him, so to speak, and let him marry and be happy at once?"

Dr. Paveley eyed her roundly. "I am not usually slow of apprehension, madam, but I fail to understand you. It is hardly possible that you could mean to suggest we should give him pecuniary assistance."

"Yes, I do. That's exactly it."

"I think it would be in the last degree disastrous. My income, moreover, is sufficient only for my own simple needs."

"My money. Your help. You see——"

"I do not think a self-respecting girl would

like her husband to be the pensioner of another woman."

"Don't you see, I want them to be happy. So do you. You know the family records. Couldn't you invent an uncle or an aunt, or some one who had long ago emigrated, and could die and leave him money? Then it would all be nice and natural, and only we and the solicitor would be a penny the wiser. Lots of people are left money, you know. What do you think?"

"I consider the plan to be quixotic and unpractical. I consider the only hope for my nephew is to have the nonsense knocked out of him by the stress of adverse circumstances. An independence would bolster him up in self-confidence. Moreover, it would be beneath my dignity to stoop to such a falsehood, to degrade myself by such deception."

"But it would be such fun, wouldn't it, to see them happy and comfortable? to be ourselves fairy godmothers? Especially since we know his ideas that the middle-aged need his help."

Dr. Paveley was pondering deeply. An abstracted look was in his eyes. He looked at and through Constantia, who thought he was perhaps yielding to what she called the fun of the thing. She gave him full time to become articulate. He at length spoke.

"Madam," he deliberately said, "I now see, beneath the rashness, the generosity of your idea. On my nephew's behalf I thank you for your impulsive kindness. But money, madam, is the root of all evil. Money, madam, in undiscriminating hands is the very mischief. I perceive that the rumours which reached me that you are wealthy are founded on fact. How wealthy you may be I do not know, nor do I ask you to inform me."

He paused for a moment, and then proceeded with the same deliberation. Constantia no more thought of interrupting him than she would have thought of interrupting a rector in the delivery of his sermon. She sat, privileged to listen, and remembered how his previous discourses had been the prelude to Paul's coming.

"I am flattered," he continued, "and touched by the fact that you have in your difficulty seen fit to approach me. It shows that you are aware of the grave responsibility of possessing and of spending money. I do not think you could have selected a more judicious adviser. I beg that you will always come to me for advice whenever you are in a similar difficulty. You are weighed down by the sense of responsibility. I offer my sturdier shoulders gladly to help you support the weight. You see me here settled after a painful upheaval in a little home of my own, in which I looked forward to spending the remainder of my days contentedly among my books and the few roses which the air of London suffers me to grow. I have had the great good fortune to find a respectable and worthy woman to attend to my small wants. Such, however, is my feeling for your situation, a simple woman, a lonely woman, a prey to the sharks who swarm round wealth, that I am willing to take the burden off those slender and delicate shoulders, and allow you to live at peace again under my ample and judicious

protection. Do not, I pray you, think my offer unseemly and indelicate. I have the greatest sympathy for bereavement of any kind; for such a bereavement as yours my heart, without exaggeration, aches. But, dear lady, I should feel it more indelicate and more unseemly if under the circumstances I allowed you to leave this house without the knowledge that you can at any moment call on me for honourable protection, without in any way infringing the unwritten yet rigid code of feminine modesty." He ceased.

"Thank you very much," said Constantia.

She saw the odd mingling of selfishness and of real kindness in his proposal. She knew that he could never imagine even what she had passed through, or how ludicrous it was to think that she could marry him after having known Paul. The extraordinary variety of human nature astounded her as it had never astounded her before.

"Thank you very much," she repeated. "I will certainly come to you for advice, as you kindly suggest. But I am unsociable and must

always live alone. It suits me best." She held out her hand to him. "Good-bye," she said. "It was good of you to spare me so much time. The tea was delicious."

"Good-bye, madam," he answered. "Allow me to open the front door for you."

He smiled benignantly at her as she got into the car.

Constantia drove to Rupert's studio. Dr. Paveley was an old dear, but an old dear, she was constrained on a sigh to acknowledge, who belonged to another species than herself. Her visit had proved a failure. He was unamenable, and might even warn Rupert's parents or Rupert himself against her intended generosity. She must speak to Rupert; he would surely understand her point of view, that it would be a greater kindness for him to take the money than for her to give it; that she would be indebted to him, not he to her.

Rupert, on her arrival, insisted that she should immediately take up her position, and he immediately became engrossed in his work. He worked with breathless absorption, while

Constantia yielded to the influence of stillness and dreamed. She dreamed that all the myriad manifestations of life in human nature were slowly working to their fulfilment like the life in the natural world. Life advanced through all the ages, struggling, fighting, working, loving. Birth and youth and age and death confronted every generation with the same problems. And the circumstances were always differing and obscuring the wisdom of the great teachers. Children were conceived in unhappiness and born in sorrow. The gloom of the parents injured the newly-born, who grew to hate the life into which they had not been welcomed. Yet nature made man to be conceived in delight and to be born through pain to the overmastering joy of the mother, whose instinct caused her to forget the pain at the first touch of the new life on her torn body. Why had man learned so little? Why did men still fear death, and still fear life? Why did men still feel aggrieved at age, aggrieved at the loss of powers which they had never put to their full uses?

"Done," cried Rupert, suddenly. "Look!"

She came and looked.

"The solemn rite," he said, and painted "Rupert Harden" in the right-hand corner or the canvas.

"I like it," said Constantia. Is it like me?"

"Something of you is in it, I believe," said Rupert.

"Paul would have liked it," said Constantia.

"That's very dear of you."

"Haven't you finished?" she asked.

"I'm inscribing its title in flaming red—The Apostle of Joy," he quietly answered.

She looked over his stooping back and saw the small burning letters being formed. The gentle lady sighed.

"We'll call in Mary," said Rupert, and going outside shouted her name.

Mary came in, small and silent. Constantia agreed with Rupert, after her first meeting with Mary, that she was like a spring morning.

"I want to talk with you, my dears," said Constantia, after Mary had looked at the portrait and approved of it. "Rather seriously,

my dears, about something rather delicate, as Rupie once said, if he has not forgotten, while he was laying my fire and putting in his word for the middle-aged."

"Of course I do remember," said Rupert. "It was jolly sound, too. Though I can't think how I ever could have had the cheek."

"I'm glad that you did have," Constantia smiled, "the cheek."

"So am I. By Jove, so am I!" he exclaimed.

"But to the point," the gentle lady continued. "I want the help of you two dears."

"Good!" cried Rupert.

"Wait till you've heard what I want. You know I am rich. I feel the responsibility of my money. And if you'd allow me. You see, I want you to be happy together at once. I want you to help me with the money. You wouldn't feel pensioners or dependant on me, or any nonsense. Just the three hundred a year from me. Of course it's what people would say that would be the difficulty. But

Paul would have so liked it—for you to be happy. And really suddenly for me to have all this money is most bewildering. You don't say anything—either of you. You think it's rather an interference. It's Loki's plan, I think, in reality."

"I don't say anything, because there's nothing for me to say. Mary doesn't, because she never does."

"You will, dears, you will?"

"Yes," said Mary, solemnly.

"What a plan! What a woman!" said Rupert, huskily.

"It's all so easy, and no one really need know. It's just, you see, to tell my solicitor. I was so afraid you might, oh, I don't know, see things stupidly. But my life's lately been a kind of fairy-tale, and it's sweet of you to keep it up. To keep it quite beautifully up we'll see that money doesn't spoil us, won't we, though there are a dreadful number of economic principles and things which I can't ever understand. I want you both to help me give. To help me find out where some

of this money might perhaps do good. Will you both help me ? "

She held out her hands to Rupert and Mary. Each took a hand, and each instinctively stooped and kissed it.

So they were very soon married ; and on the wedding-day the blue Russian kitten wore a blue silk bow round his neck, from which he fought to disentangle himself until Constantia, noticing his anger and wounded dignity, removed it.

XIV

CONSTANTIA eventually became the owner of Nunton Terrace. Her campaign against the unhappiness of its inhabitants was on the whole successful; the chance of brighter lives was put within their reach. Mrs. Martin was her chief lieutenant in that field, and her intimate knowledge of the enemy was a constant strength. Rupert was her other lieutenant; through information he discovered many young painters, musicians, and writers were lifted over steep places by a friend who remained unknown. Constantia had in her operations few failures. Her success was perhaps due to the spirit in which she gave help. Her most conspicuous failure was in the case of a labourer's son, who had a faculty for drawing and whom she had taught

engraving; he used his knowledge to become an expert forger and achieved a very long sentence of imprisonment. Another failure was in the case of a pianist, who desired above all to work for six months at Rome. She caused him to receive fifty pounds a fortnight before his recital at the Bechstein Hall. The recital was a lamentable exhibition. He broke down hopelessly, and it took him five years to win back the ground he lost in consequence of having, as the phrase is, "blown" fifty pounds in ten days on wine and food and women. Constantia rightly blamed herself more than she blamed him.

Constantia remained in the familiar crescent; but she bought an old house at Burford, partly because she wanted the pleasure of a garden, partly because she wanted several cottages, which were near the house, as nursing homes.

Her forces as time went on became more and more systematised. She lived, as she had always lived, very much alone. She made few new friends, and was intimate with no one but Rupert, and with Mary in a very much less

degree. She continued to care for all the things for which she had previously cared, and she was happy in seeing the happiness of others. She trained that rare gift in herself in the same way as she trained her ear to music and her eye to painting and her brain to the beauty of words. Her joy in these things grew as her sensitiveness to beauty deepened. The house at Burford praised God in the living brightness of the flowers which surrounded it, and in the living happiness of those who slept within its old walls.

So Constantia gently lived the remainder of her life—gently as in the days before the capture and resuscitation of the mouse. Then she gently died. She went away with as little regret as our child in the house who, after her wonderful afternoon of exploration, obeyed with only a happy sigh the imperious summons to go back to the nursery. She left her fortune to Rupert, who carried on her campaign against unhappiness in the same way as she had done, and lived in the house at Burford. The old oak pieces became his most valued possessions.

The semblance of life continued to glare out of the carved features of Loki with unaltered fierceness.

Dr. Paveley's domestic, most unluckily for the eminent scholar's comfort, took to drink. He was unable to replace her satisfactorily, and happening some six months after our gentle lady's death to pass by his old rooms in the crescent, he realised that the rooms were to let. He went in and spoke to the timid landladies, and being offered all the rooms on the first and second and third floors at only ten pounds more than he had previously paid for the rooms on the first and second floors, he cheerfully knocked a sovereign off the sum, and immediately closed with what it gave him continual satisfaction to think was a bargain.

So our gentle lady's footprints in the sand were washed out by the advancing tide. But many girl-babies in the neighbourhoods especially of Nunton Terrace and of Chelsea were called Constantia, many boy-babies Paul. And the children stopped playing or quarrelling to listen when the virtues of Miss Paul or Mrs.

Paul (either title was used indiscriminately) were being discussed by their parents. Quite a legend grew up round her name. In one imaginative woman's tale the streak of white hair that waved up from her forehead became an aureole. However that may be, a little corner of the world was unquestionably cleaner and brighter and happier because she had lived. That is why her history is worth recording.

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